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Buenos Aires at Home and Away: *Flâneuses in Exile* in Two Novels From Argentina.

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the concept of sense of place in relation to home and exile in the context of Buenos Aires and two novels by contemporary Argentinean women writers. The first three chapters establish the conceptual and historical framework: the concept of sense of place itself, the city in literature, and literary representations of Buenos Aires. The next two chapters analyze Luisa Valenzuela's *La travesía* (2001) and Reina Roffé's *El cielo dividido* (1996) whose protagonists are confronted with exile, one in New York, the other newly returned to Buenos Aires after a period of absence. In both novels, through the figure of a *flâneuse* intent on discovering or recovering the Buenos Aires of her mind through the everyday, unique experiences of *flânerie*, the authors redefine the conventional image of the city in terms of a renegotiation of the cultural in light of the individual and subjective experiences of their protagonists.

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Introduction

> [Andrew:] You know that point in your life when you realize the house you grew up in isn't really your home anymore. All of a sudden, even though you have some place you can put your stuff, that idea of home is gone.
> [Sam:] I still feel at home in my house…
> [Andrew:] You'll see when you move out. Just sorta happens one day, and it's gone. You feel like you can never get it back. It's like you feel homesick for a place that doesn't even exist. Maybe it's like this rite of passage, you know. You won't ever have that feeling again until you create a new idea of home for yourself. You know, for your kids. For the family you start. It's like a cycle or something. I don't know, but I miss the idea of it, you know? Maybe that's all family really is. A group of people that miss the same imaginary place… (Braff, 2003)

In Zach Braff's movie *Garden State*, Andrew Largeman has returned to his hometown after years of absence to attend the funeral of his mother. But his home place, somewhere in Jersey, just doesn't feel like home anymore. He is a stranger there, an outsider, yet at the same time he is somehow part of the home from which he feels so removed. He realizes that maybe what he is missing – the home – has actually never really existed, that he created the idea of it in his head. Maybe, instead of an actual childhood spent at home (which was not particularly happy anyway), what he has been missing all these years is the *idea* of home, an imaginary place. He recognizes that even though it might be imaginary, it has been exercising an enormous power over him. The return to the real/material home helps him to understand that he has to let go of this imaginary place that seems to confine him, and start to live his life again, and maybe create a new home of his own.

The short quotation from Zach Braff's movie presents a certain idea of the home, from which one departs and to which one later returns, but also raises many

questions about *places*, and the enormous importance they have for people. The emotional reflection of this particular movie character about the places of his life sets the tone for the discussion that will follow in this thesis. Braff's idea of home as imaginary place can extend to any of the other places people experience during their lives: local streets, parks, neighborhoods, towns, cities, regions, entire countries. The ideas of home, displacement, imaginary places, memory and images of faraway destinations that people create in their minds, the mental confinement that certain places create, and much more, are all part of the discourse about places.

The topic of place and its experience, as well as the idea of sense of place, have become important in a number of Humanities and Social Science disciplines. Drawing on some of the insights developed in Human and Cultural Geography on how people and cultures interact with their environment, I intend to approach the literary representations of particular cities in this thesis. My purpose is to gain a better understanding of how narratives of exile capture a sense of place of present and absent cities and represent the individual experience of place of displaced subjects caught between *here* and *there*, struggling to reconcile their imaginary past with the reality of the cities they inhabit.

While Human Geography focuses "more on the mind than on the land" (Monaghan: 3) and analyzes how humans inhabit places through their bodies, emotions, minds and spirits, Cultural Geography explores how human experience is embedded in places that are constantly being ascribed certain individual and culturally shared meanings which are often represented in texts. Through these cultural texts we imagine places that we don't know or we use them to "reinterpret

those we know first-hand" (Shurmer-Smith: 130). The underlying assumption of Cultural Geography is that representation is never "a cold reporting" of environment. People encounter places "as a consequence of the ways in which they are depicted and then react to knowledge of their image" (131). In a way, then, place and its image fuse. As a consequence, literary representations do not mimetically reflect material cities, but reconstruct their multiple cultural images and create textual palimpsests through the perspective of individual experiences.

Against this conceptual background, I would like to consider how the meaning of place is conveyed in literature that focuses on questions of exile and the point of view of an outsider. The literature of exile deals with the issues of place, nostalgia, and memory of the past. My discussion of literary texts belonging to this category concerns three central themes: creating a sense of place in the city, the perspective of displacement, and the subjective experience of the *flâneuse* and *flânerie* as a particular mode of knowing the city. These issues are examined in the concrete context of Argentina and Buenos Aires and the particularity of literature of exile related to that country and city. I look at how two Argentinean novels, *La travesía* (2001) by Luisa Valenzuela and *Cielo dividido* (1996) by Reina Roffé, textualize the experience of displacement and evoke a sense of place of the two cities that they represent: Buenos Aires and New York. I am also interested in seeing how the image of Buenos Aires in these novels differs from the conventional portrayal that represents a predominantly male perspective of the city. In addition to several accounts of literary images of Buenos Aires from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, some critical works about the modern and contemporary cultural image of

city have appeared, such as Laura Podalsky's *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (2004) or David William Foster's *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production* (1998). However, the issue of the literary image of Buenos Aires in the narratives of women writers, with a special focus on the perspective of displacement, has not yet been fully undertaken in literary criticism. In this respect, my thesis is an excursion into relatively unexplored territory.

In pursuing the general issue of the intimate relationships between people and places, this thesis is divided into five chapters that explore theories of place, its representation in literature, with some consideration of the perspective of exile, the history of literary images of Buenos Aires, and two particular representations of Buenos Aires in works by two contemporary women writers of the experience of exile.

In Chapter 1, titled "Place, Space and Experience", I address the ongoing debate about place and space in the Humanities and Social Sciences with a special emphasis on approaches in Human and Cultural Geography. In order to generate a working definition of space and place I show how the experiential perspective on place of the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan and Henri Lefebvre's spatial perspective merge into contemporary theories of cultural geographers such as Edward Soja and Doreen Massey as a basis for examining the idea of the constructed character of sense of place.

The second chapter, "Reading and Writing the Literary City" is concerned with how places, especially cities, have been represented in literature. I look above all

at the idea of *flânerie* as a mode of expression of the modern urban experience and at the possibility of the representation of contemporary, postmodern metropolis. I also take up the issue of reading the city by female subjects and consider their non-categorizing and non-possessive gaze and engagement of the urban environment.

Chapter 3, "Buenos Aires at Home and Away" briefly explores the history of literary images of Buenos Aires that have represented the city as the scene of the social and individual life of *porteños*. I also address the idea of Argentinean exile and the importance of nostalgia and displacement, resulting in the condition of the outsider, and the creation of the image of Buenos Aires as an absent city. Finally, I argue that the male gaze and experiences dominate in traditional cultural projections of the city and propose that a consideration of accounts of the city by women writers reveals a different image, one more attuned to the female subjectivity that results from the practice of *flânerie*.

In Chapter 4 titled "*Flânerie* in New York: In Search of Buenos Aires in *La travesía* by Luisa Valenzuela", I analyze how the engagement of Valenzuela's protagonist in an "anthropologizing" *flânerie* in New York gives shape to the Buenos Aires of her memory. Marcela Osorio's escapist *travesía* through the exciting and chaotic streets of New York is an attempt to exorcize the traumatic experiences of her past in Buenos Aires that are eventually recovered and acknowledged as an intrinsic part of her identity as an exile.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "Going Home: Intimate Geographies in *El cielo dividido* by Reina Roffé", I examine the experience of being out-of-place at home as textualized through the confusing narration of the sensory and emotional *flânerie*

practised in the Buenos Aires of her return to the city by Eleonora Ellis in Roffé's novel. Eleonora goes back only to find herself in an unrecognizable place with which she has to establish a completely new relationship. She eventually fails to reconstruct a coherent image of the city of her memory and, instead, comes to terms with the ever-changing sense of place in the fragmentary city of her present.

As a displaced person myself, albeit voluntarily, I am particularly interested in seeing how a sense of place evolves when a person moves between the home place and exile and how the complex feelings about places experienced under these circumstances can be textualized through narrative. I endeavour to show in my thesis that the practice of female *flânerie* in the context of exile is an effective way to express the traumatic experience of displacement and to show in a unique and subjective way how our senses and emotions discover or recover places that we also know through culturally accepted images. Such a perspective requires our sense of place to be in constant flux, whereby, as Doreen Massey suggests and as I explain in the following pages, its dynamic character is re-negotiated with every "spatio-temporal event" through which an individual sense of place emerges.

CHAPTER 1

PLACE, SPACE AND EXPERIENCE

Place is a word often encountered in everyday speech. People use it intuitively to describe reality without thinking too much about its meaning. Everything we do takes place; we go places, stay places, or come from places… However, usually when we refer to them we are not primarily interested in giving spatial coordinates that mark our location. When we ask someone if s/he went to a certain place we are interested in much more than just information regarding latitude and longitude. The place in question has a name, a locality, and therefore a certain meaning. Tim Cresswell, who has written an excellent summary of the role of place in contemporary cultural geography, points this out quite clearly:

> 40.46°N 73.58°W does not mean that much to most people. Some people with a sound knowledge of the globe may be able to tell you what it signifies but to most of us these are just numbers indicating a location – a site without meaning. These co-ordinates mark the location of New York City – somewhere south of Central Park in Manhattan. Immediately many images come into our heads. […] Replacing a set of numbers with a name means that we begin to approach 'place'. (Cresswell, 2004: 2)

What are these images of places one holds? How are they created? Let us consider a different example. Imagine you are in Peru, climbing the Inca trail to Machu Picchu with your best friend, your kindred spirit, more importantly. You are very similar people, always have been. It's a great day, early afternoon. You are both fit but you experience the same tiredness and therefore are even more eager to get to your destination. Finally you reach your objective and arrive at Machu Picchu, a place

whose image you both know from postcards, history books, movies, and university lectures. Considering you admired it on the same photos, listened to those lectures together, attentively, and now remember the history of the place you are looking at, would you say that your experience of that place is the same? Do you see exactly the same thing? In the same way? Is there any essence to that place, which you have just discovered, any inherent *genius loci*, a spirit of the place? If you were to narrate your experiences, would your images be exactly identical? You want to answer instinctively: "Of course we see the same thing, but we would describe it differently if we had to". Yes, that is true; the imaginary worlds of two people describing their experiences have little in common. But the question remains: at the moment of experience, is it the same place we see? What is a sense of place that one has of a particular location? The answer varies according to different theories about space and place.

Sense of place could be ready-made, embedded in a place and waiting to be discovered, or it may be socially produced at any given moment. Or, maybe it is an individual, unrepeatable and ever-changing outcome of the momentary combination of our experiences, knowledge, feelings and imagination at a given moment in time: "emotion-spatial experiences" (Jones: 206) or "spatio-temporal events" (Massey, 2005: 130). These are questions with which many Humanities and Social Science disciplines have been increasingly concerned over the last 40 years. The question of place and locality is discussed as widely as the question of space, and the two terms often operate in strict opposition to one another. Tim Cresswell notes that "place is not yet a specialized piece of academic terminology" (1). Similarly, definitions of

space have been undertaken extensively but there are still many disagreements about how to analyze it.

Nevertheless, any study of the experience of place and its representation in literature requires working definitions of place and space as a point of departure. For this reason, I propose to begin by discussing the meanings of the two terms in order to establish what place is, how it differs from space. My purpose is to present how I will apply the two terms in literary analysis.

Focus on place: Yi-Fu Tuan and Human Geography

Place and space, as seems natural, have always been discussed in the field of Geography. Research on place and space in other disciplines has had an enormous influence, but Geography is still the only field that has endeavoured to encompass and negotiate many different approaches within its own field of inquiry. Traditionally, Geography, especially Physical Geography, was dedicated to describing Earth's physical processes and phenomena, and geographical place is defined as a location on Earth characterized by certain physical features. Physical Geography is far removed from the realm of Human Geography, where developments in the last 40 years clearly show that the question of place goes beyond its mere physicality and geometry, and forms part of recent discussions about economics, politics, the study of society as construct, and the role of culture in our lives. Human Geography is concerned with the spatial aspects of human existence. It looks at how people and their activities are distributed in space, how they use and perceive it, and how they create and sustain places. It assumes that place cannot be studied independently of people, because

places are always individually and socially constructed, and therefore have to be understood in relation to the individual as well as to a social group. One of the great contributions of Human Geography is its recognition of the fact that human activity, creativity, and emotions play a central role in the meaning attributed to places.

A pioneer in Human Geography, Yi-Fu Tuan, argues that experience is a mode "through which a person knows and constructs reality" (1995: 8). Tim Cresswell sees Tuan's focus on human experience as crucial for understanding our environment because "through human perception and experiences we get to know the world through places" (Cresswell: 20). Tuan coins the idea of place as defined and personalized space. Once we get to know our surroundings intimately, an "abstract space, lacking significance other than strangeness, becomes concrete place, filled with meaning" (1995: 200). Tuan's own words explain his approach to space and place quite clearly:

> Place is a type of object. Places and objects define space. [...] A neighborhood is at first a confusion of images to the new resident; it is blurred space "out there". Learning to know the neighborhood requires the identification of significant localities, such as street corners and architectural landmarks, within the neighborhood space. Objects and places are centres of value. (17-18)

Tuan looks at places from an experiential perspective, focusing on how one acquires the intimate familiarity and feeling of attachment to places throughout a lifetime. In *Topophilia* (1974) he gives special attention to emotional ties and attachment to places that physical Geography hardly ever considered a factor. "Topophilia", literally meaning "love of place", is a crucial concept that has had an enormous impact on the field of Human Geography and the study of place. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1985 [1977]), Tuan advocates a thorough

knowledge of a place, beyond its fleeting visual experience, a knowledge that engages all senses, as the only way to acquire topophilia, a sense of place, or a feel for place that is a basic component of one's sense of identity:

> [...] the feel of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day, and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of place is registered in one's muscles and bones. [...] Knowing a place, in the above senses, clearly takes time. It is a subconscious kind of knowing. In time we become familiar with a place, which means that we can take more and more of it as granted. [...] Attachment, whether to a person or locality is rarely acquired in passing [...]. (1995: 183-84)

He argues that the perspectives we have on space are products of our own perception of it, conditioned by the way we lived it (41). Personal experience of place is therefore the most significant factor in our assessment of a particular space. The experience, according to Tuan (41), can be direct or conceptual, mediated by symbols. We know our home intimately, but we can only know *about* our country if it is very large. Tuan argues that a person may know a place intimately as well as conceptually.

Peter Monaghan calls Tuan the first true humanist in Geography, since he was a pioneer in trying to synthesize nature and culture in his research and look at "human habitation of the earth as distinct from the physical earth itself" (1). Influenced by Phenomenology, from within the discipline of Geography, Tuan explores such topics as symbolic landscapes (giving a special emphasis to the symbolic importance and meaning of home) and the way senses as well as values and attitudes influence human perception of the environment. According to Tuan, the human mind is capable of making the world much more than just a physical setting. This was why he believed

that Geography needed a new direction. For him, a place is a center of "action and intention", it is a "focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence" (Tuan, 1995: 42). It is natural, then, that events and actions are significant only in the context of certain places, and are colored and influenced by the character of those places even as they contribute to it (42). Each of those elements of everyday reality we distinguish as places involves a concentration of different intentions, attitudes, purposes and experiences, setting them apart from the surrounding space while remaining a part of it. In other words, place is lived and experienced space, a conclusion that makes Yi-Fu Tuan's work an important point of departure, because it shows that places are "basic elements in the ordering of our experiences of the world" (43).

The majority of people realize that particular places can have a considerable effect on how they feel and define themselves. To most individuals, some places seem superficial and unimportant, while others have a deeper meaning consciously recognized or felt as an inexplicable but strong attachment that does not necessarily have to be equated with a feeling of sympathy. People usually experience a linkage between lived or imagined places and their own sense of self – a "sense of place". Architects, designers and planners strive to create a unique "sense of place", poets and writers feel it around them and describe it, while anthropologists, geographers or specialists in cultural studies perceive it as a complex phenomenon and continually debate its nature. Despite its popularity and common use, the concept, introduced by Yi-Fu Tuan, cannot be seen straightforwardly and exclusively as a set of subjective meanings, values and feelings that humans have towards a certain location.

A slightly different approach, developed by Yi-Fu Tuan's follower, Edward C. Relph, considers "sense of place" as the spirit of a certain area, region, or landscape, an essential character that is inherent to it, buried, waiting to be discovered. In addition to recognizing the existence of an intimate and emotional attachment to place as a result of human experience, he also seeks an "authentic" sense of place, which, as expressed by Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, "implies that a fundamental, lasting truth about the place is known, going beyond the ephemerality of the constantly changing modern world, and tapping into an unchanging *genius loci*, or unique *spirit of place*" (76).

The mixing of experience, emotion, memory, imagination, present situation, and intention within one person can be so variable that a particular place may be seen in many, quite distinct ways. In *Place and Placelessness*, Relph argues that the identity of a place varies with the intentions, personalities, and circumstances of those who are experiencing it (Relph, 1976: 56-57). All individual images are not independent however; they have been and are being constantly socialized through common languages, symbols, and experiences so that diverse personal images *can be* brought together into a common social image of place (57). Although one particular place may have quite different identities for different groups, there is some common ground of agreement about the identity of that place. This is the consensus identity of a place, in effect its "lowest common denominator" (58). It corresponds to Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" whose members will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in their minds lives the image of their communion. Imagined community members share a common identity and this identity needs to be

sustained by the narrative of collective memory. Heavily influenced by Phenomenology, Relph believes that places have essences and meanings that are universal. His approach, according to Mike Crang, "suggests that there is only one true or 'authentic' relationship to a place, and other relationships are either imperfect or 'inauthentic'" (109).

At variance with Relph's position, geographers informed by Marxism, feminism and poststructuralism in the last 30 years, have engaged with wider fields of social theory and cultural studies. An awareness of the issues of class, gender, race, and identity have made it clear that places do not have natural, inherent meanings and are not uniquely embedded with subjective meanings:

> While humanists claim that place is a universal experience (while at the same time using the word 'man' as the universal person) they fail to recognize the differences between people and their relations to place. In the search for 'essence' – the 'difference' is lost. (Cresswell: 25)

In *Place* (2004), Tim Cresswell explains the flaws in Yi-Fu Tuan's idealist thinking about "home" – an intimately lived ideal space. Cresswell notes that home is not always an ideal environment based on a heterosexual family: it "can be an oppressive, confining and even terrifying place for many people – especially for abused women and children" (109). Cresswell's example demonstrates that Human Geography of the 1970s and early 1980s clearly ignored the world outside human feeling and thought, omitting the politics behind different ways of understanding place. Human geographers of the 1970s engaged in the impossible task of accessing the interior experience of an individual or finding the essence and authenticity of place. Nonetheless, while their enquiries were not totally conclusive, they undoubtedly contributed to the understanding of place by establishing how humans often perceive

themselves as essentially rooted in places, and how these places are almost always invested with meaning, memories and feelings.

Focus on space: Henri Lefebvre

Until the mid-1980s, human geographers marginalized space as void of meaning and importance, while focusing on the individual and subjective experience of place. Since then, the new field of Cultural Geography has developed from Human Geography. It attempts to explore cultural phenomena that influence how individuals perceive, imagine, think, and talk about places. It explores the ways in which place/space is culturally and collectively/socially constructed and bound up with the power relations that exist in the social world. The originality of the perspective embodied in Cultural Geography derives from the very idea of considering the human environment as a cultural product, while culture is understood as "sets of beliefs and values that give meaning to ways of life and produce (and are reproduced through) material and symbolic forms" (Crang: 2). Thus, Cultural Geography always looks for difference and is "about the diversity and plurality of life in all its variegated richness; about how the world, spaces and places are interpreted and used by people; and how those places then help to perpetuate that culture" (Crang: 3). Cultural geographers consider high culture, popular culture and the everyday; they look at places through the lens of the social, the economic and the political, although approaches in Cultural Geography are as diverse as culture itself, and do not represent a unified outlook on the issue of people-space-place relationships.

One of the most important discussions that considers perspectives other than the purely subjective, or commonly shared feelings towards place and space, is the account of space by Henri Lefebvre. The French philosopher revitalized and brought the notion of space into social inquiry through his 1974 book *The Production of Space*, although it was only translated and introduced into the English-speaking world in 1991. Before Lefebvre's ideas became widely known in North America, many human geographers, starting with Yi-Fu Tuan, believed that abstract, intangible and amorphous space could not be described directly, because as soon as we began to talk about it, name it, picture its specificities and thereby inevitably endow it with meanings, we were already talking about a place. For example, 40.46°N 73.58°W is a point in geometric space, but from the moment we realize it is New York City, we see it in a completely new dimension. First, we can place it on the map within the territory of the United States (it has a specific location); second, we can visualize its material shape whether we have a first-hand experience or not (it is a specific locale); and, third, we realize that it has a capacity to produce specific, meaningful relationships to people (it can evoke a sense of place).

Lefebvre sees space in a completely different, meaningful way. He recognizes different types of space, such as, for example, natural absolute space, a mental space of abstraction, or a constructed social space. Moreover, he offers three concepts to describe different categories of spatial experience. The first of these is "spatial practice", which presupposes space as empirically observable through the senses, perceived, and lived directly ("practised") before it is conceptualized: "it [spatial practice] embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality

(daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (Lefebvre: 38). Spatial practice produces (social) space through the ways in which space is appropriated, thereby leading Lefebvre to the idea of the "production of space" by societies, meaning that social space is a social product. Every society produces its own space as an expression of the different social structures and relations operating within it. Following Lefebvre, Cloke remarks: "[...] socially produced spaces help to structure, mold and reinforce certain kinds of social behaviors, assumptions, and relationships that in turn have a profound political effect" (1991: 18). The spatial practice of every society and, accordingly, "the social production of space" can be revealed by deciphering its space.

Lefebvre's second concept, "representations of space" relies on the notion of "conceived space", that is, the scientific, conceptualized and ordered space of the planner, urbanist or architect: "all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (Lefebvre: 38). This is a knowable space encoded with signs, the verbalized space of thought, which, for Lefebvre is the "dominant space in any society (or mode of production)" (39). What remains unverbalized and to some extent even unconscious, is Lefebvre's third concept, the lived, "representational space" of the mind that encompasses individual and collective memories, symbolic and imaginary associations of time and places. It is alive and formed by everyday life:

> It is the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space, which the imagination seeks to change and

> appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. (Lefebvre: 39)

Nevertheless, "representational space" must always be considered in immediate relation to "spatial practice" and "representations of space" since they are all separate facets of the same phenomenon.

Spatial sociology/socialism and the idea of space as a social construct might seem a bit too simplistic in its endeavor to explain a more complex reality. As Cresswell notes, "societies cannot construct anything without first 'being in place'" as "place is primary to the construction of meaning and society" (32). Nevertheless, despite certain limitations, Lefebvre's theory must be mentioned here, not just because he points to the social as a factor in the production of space, but precisely because of his innovative idea of space as being *produced* and therefore *relative* to social and natural processes (Cloke: 19). Lefebvre's space is multi-facetted and multi-coded (Dear: 54), opening a way for more holistic views that take the actual practice of everyday life into account: "apart from the anything else, Lefebvre's conceptualization of space obliges geographers and others to move beyond the sense of space as given, a priori, absolute, and to treat space instead as in the first place relative" (Cloke: 19). Moreover, Lefebvre's idea of space as a product makes us aware that the experience of space occurs on many different, more or less conscious levels. It may be verbalized or just observable through the senses. Space is practiced at the level of everyday life but it is conceptualized on the level of professional, scientific practices, and is also symbolically alive in the individual and social imaginary.

Place and space: towards "a spatio-temporal event of place"

In *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), Edward Soja draws on Lefebvre's spatial theories and describes a relationship with space that has more to do with daily practice than with any embedded, ready-made meanings. Aside from the traditional dualism between "space as it is" (material, real, perceived) and "space as we conceive it" (imagined, mental, cognitive, and "intellectually worked out"), he finds a "space in-between", understood as ever-changing practice, performed on a daily basis (Soja: 10). This is a lived space that he identifies with the term "thirdspace", a space that is as "purposefully tentative and flexible" (2) as the lived space of experience, emotion, and practice, which is real and imagined at the same time (Lefebvre: 31). While in-depth analysis of Soja's ideas is not my concern here, it is important to emphasize his idea of "thirdspace" as an alternative to a more traditional place-space binary, because it accepts the complexity and ambiguity of the world around us, and sees our interaction with our surroundings as an inherently unfinished process, thereby approaching the idea of "place as an event", a process that requires further explanation.

In contemporary constructivist approaches, the idea of open and relative space (or alternatives, like Soja's space-in-between), often eliminate place from the equation as simply being too closed and confined, too local in the global world of interconnectedness and the flux of images. It is often said that "sense of place" is lost and replaced by the fragmented placelessness of the neoliberal era of global communication and new technologies. However, places have not ceased to exist or to produce meanings, especially in the contemporary world of flux, movement and

change. In this chapter so far I have presented two different mainstream approaches to place and space, one that sees place as meaningful when it is endowed with human subjectivity and another that sees space as a repository of social meanings, a product of any given society. The examination of these two approaches inevitably leads to the question of what definition should be used when talking about the human environment as described and narrated in literature. Each approach contributes to the understanding of the environment, but has obvious limitations. Focusing on place and individual, subjective sense of it or seeing the world as a collection of meaningful places are good points of departure, but one also has to be aware of the cultural and social context within which each individual operates and perceives the world. On the other hand, social theories call for abandonment of the essentialist and subjective notion of place in favor of the idea of socially constructed space and its meaning. However, this approach is also reductionist, because it eliminates the idea of place completely, depriving it of any meaning. Yet the place is still there and nothing can be constructed without it first being in place (Cresswell: 32).

The idea of *production/performance/practice* is a necessary part of the everyday experience of place. It suggests a new understanding of place: as never finished and always in a process of becoming. The idea is associated with Anthony Giddens, and the social theory of structuration, which sees any kind of structure (the small and the large, such as local and national institutions) as a product of human agency (and thus a socio-cultural product), at the same time as it gives meaning to human actions. According to Cresswell (35), we should see place simultaneously as a structure assembled by humans that has a certain material form determining its use

and also as a phenomenon that contains all sorts of less concrete but equally powerful and determining structures, laws, and rules, and expectations set by society, and produced by culture. These socio-cultural expectations tell people what to do in certain places and what to expect of them, since "at a given moment in time, place provides a geographically specific set of structures" (36). Nevertheless, they never totally embrace the practice of place, because of the unpredictability of human actions: "Human agency is not so easily structured and structures themselves are made through the repetition of practices by agents. [...] [Place] needs to be studied in terms of the 'dominant institutional projects' and individual biographies of people negotiating the place" (36-37). In a way, place is never complete, then, but "always a result of processes and practices" (37), a conceptualization that is a consequence of the search for a less abstract notion of space.

For the purposes of literary analysis, I would like to suggest an approach that geographer Doreen Massey introduced in her essay "A Global Sense of Place" (1997) and further developed in her book *For Space* (2005). Here she proposes an understanding of places and spaces not based on the opposition of the two terms. She does not deny the importance of place, but she proposes an investigation of its "character" in a progressive way. Massey rejects most traditional and, according to her, reactionary views of issues related to space and place. She argues that spatial imaginaries in academic writing insist on binaries such as place/space, global/local, abstract/coherent, and reason/emotion (Massey, 2005: 183). Place is viewed as a real, rooted and authentic locale, always set in opposition to abstract space. As Massey argues, however, if it really were the case that place is the meaningful reality of our

daily lives and space is just an abstraction, "where would you draw the line around the lived reality of your daily life?" (2005: 184). She is afraid that retreating to a place, which seems to be a reaction to a globalized world of instability, can signify "building walls" around home places that become synonymous with a local, rooted authenticity that has to be defended against the invaders (6). G. J. Asworth and Brian Graham discuss Massey's ideas and note that: "In defining the discourses of inclusion and exclusion that constitute identity, people call upon an affinity with places or, at least, with representations of places, which, in turn, are used to legitimate their claim to those places" (3). From here, the road to nationalism and xenophobia is obviously short. According to Massey, in such a reading, place is a very reactionary term that stands in opposition to the neoliberal idea of global space that entails worldwide interconnections and openness. Place is "closed, coherent, integrated as authentic, as 'home', as secure retreat" (2005: 6). But she also rejects the perspective that sees places as meaningful, lived, everyday reality while leaving space aside as an abstract, meaningless geometry. Space is "heterogeneity of practices and processes" (106). As a consequence, neither space nor place offers a firm ground to stand on: "things are not inert, and everything is connected to something else", full of "loose ends and ongoing stories" (107). That is why she doubts the possibility of exploring from above and making a coherent narration out of the practices of daily life. She specifically refers to Michel de Certeau's exploration of the possibility of making the complexity of the city readable through the examination of the practices of walking (de Certeau: 92).

She proposes an alternative approach to space and place that encourages rethinking both terms and avoiding traditional explanations. She argues for the reconceptualization of *place as a spatio-temporal event* and for abandoning the assumption of its coherence as pre-given and settled "only to be disturbed by 'external' forces" (2005: 141). The openness of the concept of *place as an event* does not change human perception of the reality into a bottomless infinity of interpretations, nor does it make the experience of place less unique or less authentic. It allows for a deeper understanding of the interconnections and relations that are at work when we experience places:

> You arrive in Paris. Flop exhausted into a café. The distinctive mixture of coffee and black tobacco envelops you. You anticipate some real French food. Your senses attune to the specificity of this place. Yes, this is the real Paris, France. Except, of course, and you know this perfectly well at the same time, neither the coffee nor all of the food on your plate is grown in France. They're not exactly indigenous. Quintessential France is already a hybrid [...]. The intellectual in you knows all this; and anyway the *open relational construction of place* in no way works against the specificity and uniqueness, it just understands its derivation in a different way. (169; my emphasis)

As we go about our lives, move in space and time (as it passes by), we continue creating places. To illustrate her point, Massey offers the example of her commuter travel by train from London to the town of Milton Keynes (118). She argues that traveling through space always alters places a little: "space and place emerge through active material practices" (118). London, Milton Keynes, and herself, are changed by the travel, and that change is a result of the movement that is spatial and temporal at the same time. The notion of time is therefore crucial in Massey's rethinking of place and space. No place has one single, essential identity given by "some long, internalized history" (1997: 322). Place is an event in a specific time and space, in

other words it is a "spatio-temporal event", or "space-time integration" (2005: 130). Massey's London-Milton Keynes journey explains it further:

> The London you left just a half an hour ago [...] is not the London of now. It has already moved on. Lives have pushed ahead, investments and disinvestments have been made in the City, it has begun to rain quite heavily [...] a crucial meeting has broken up acrimoniously, someone has caught a fish in the Grand Union Canal. And you are on your way to meet up with a Milton Keynes which is also moving on. Arriving in a new place means joining up with, somehow linking into the collection of interwoven stories of which that place is made. (118-19)

In other words, we move through space/places that consist of trajectories/stories/lives. While some of them remain unacknowledged by us, others we pick up, and when we "encounter" them, a *spatio-temporal event* of "here-and-now" occurs:

> [...] 'here' is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities that lend continuity. (139)
>
> What is special about the place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a 'here-and-now'. (140)

In Massey's reading, place is still important and unique, and that uniqueness is assured by constant, specific spatio-temporal moments, temporary constellations that we make sense of. Sense of place is therefore progressive, constructed

> [...] out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. If one moves in from the satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one's head, then each place can be seen as a particular, unique point of their intersection. It is indeed, a meeting place. (1997: 322)

Places are processes, always under construction, never finished and closed, they tie together social and individual interactions and their "specificity is constantly reproduced" (323).

Although Massey's conclusions differ from those reached by others, they return us nonetheless to the notion that places are inseparably bound to the experience of everyday life both in its individual and social dimensions. The physical settings of our lives are certainly more than just a mere material context for our actions; they "constitute a powerful part of the individual and social practices which people use consciously to transform the material world into cultural and economic realms of meaning and lived experience" (Ashworth and Graham: 3). Returning then to the example of Machu Picchu, it now seems quite straightforward to suppose that no two people, even kindred spirits, experiencing one place at the same time, can experience the "spirit of place" in an identical way. Their observation of the ruined city is a unique moment of "intersection", a "meeting place" of particular readings of its past, individual experiences and a particular position that determines their respective points of view. If we were to describe that moment, we would rarely hear similar stories: "a great deal [...] depends on what particular instance of place we chose to look at" (Cresswell: 75). The fact that we view and comprehend the same places in very different ways contributes directly to our individuality, as is apparent in the ways we talk about places:

> [...] as people construct places, places construct people (inferring reciprocity between people and place). [...] this relationality is not something which is fixed and unchanging. Relationships between people and places are always in a state of *becoming* rather than of simply 'being' [...] there is no point at which we can just stop and unproblematically capture a snapshot of people-place relationships. The relationships, and the people and places themselves, will have moved on before we know it. (Holloway and Hubbard: 7)

These relationships, Massey's continuous negotiations of place, are characterized by the interplay between individual and social meanings and play a

crucial role in the formation of the sense of place, and also in a way we perceive and describe the world. Places are often represented in literature, but given the underlying notion of their progressiveness and constructedness, one might think that the task of approaching literary places would be impossible. In the next chapter, I intend to offer some understanding of how places are represented and constructed through narrative.

CHAPTER 2

READING AND WRITING THE LITERARY CITY

Representing reality

Doreen Massey advises that we cannot see places as a flat surface, as we see maps: coherent systems of connections, ordered, unchangeable. A map can sometimes function as an archetype of representation, as a "truthful" depiction of the world for some who read it. In reality, even maps have deeper layers of meaning because they are selective, political, and present "just another way of looking at the world" (Massey, 2005: 107). The mapmaker selects, omits, simplifies, classifies, creates hierarchies, and symbolizes reality, producing a representation of the world full of intention, silence and power (Harley: 10). It is evident that maps also tell us stories of the world at a certain moment in time and space (Massey, 2005: 108), but they don't fix time. Maps are texts that use signs to represent the world in a particular way:

> As images of the world, maps are never neutral or value-free or ever completely scientific. Each map argues its own particular case. [...] Theirs is not an innocent reality dictated by the intrinsic truth of the data; they are engaging in the ancient art of rhetoric. (Harley: 37)

A mapmaker presents places from a point of view informed by cultural and political power relations that are at play. Similarly, just as a mapmaker identifies places already located and possibly named with the purpose of representing them on a map, a writer creates places in the mind and narrates them (Entrikin: 25). Both, inevitably, leave gaps and holes in their representations, creating spaces for the imagination.

The notion of representation as a portrait of the world implies the immediate problem of distinction between the reality of everyday life and the image of it. Stuart Aitken (6) argues that there is no such thing as simply "present" everyday experience, because it is always *re-presented* simultaneously through "the contradictory images that constitute our postmodern world and through the everyday pretensions of our gender, class, and racial identities" (7). We tend to take the *impression* of reality that we have in our minds as the reflection of the *real*, thereby prompting the question of what is real. Peter Turchi takes the argument a step forward towards a more scientific explanation:

> Every brain constructs the world in a slightly different way from any other because every brain is different. The sight of an external object will vary from person to person because no two people have precisely the same number of motion cells, or straight-line cells, For example, one person – someone with a particularly well-developed colour area, say – may look at the bowl of fruit and be struck by the gleaming colours and the way they relate to each other. Another – with a more active depth discriminatory area – may be caught instead by the three-dimensional form of the display. A third may notice the outline. A fourth may home in on some detail. In each case the raw data would be identical but the image brought to consciousness would be different. (147)

In addition to the data we collect about reality there are certain structures we use to interpret and represent it (King: 253). The manner of representing depends on the identity, necessities and goals, and cultural, social, economic and political context in which we live. It is also determined by the language consciously or unconsciously used. Thinking about the world has a narrative quality; making stories is a basic mode of speaking about reality and narration tries to give an integral and finished shape to a stream of events, feelings, and thoughts in order to "catch" or "domesticate" the world (Domańska: 84-105). According to Richard Martin, whatever we see,

understand, and then represent, we always use "our own concept of reality as a framework" (28). When creating a conscious image of place, we are subconsciously capturing within it the image of our own personal reality (our background, gender, personality, psychology, interests, and knowledge) and "our cultural and social conditioning also produces preference, emphasizing certain parts of a scene more than others" (28). Consequently, "reality has more to do with the way an individual knows, and it can only exist as we experience it" (28). Trevor Barnes and James Duncan see human agency as the most important factor; the way we represent the world around us is therefore always individually and socially constructed:

> Pieces of the world [...] do not come with their own labels, and thus representing 'out there' to an audience must involve more than just lining up pieces of language in the right order. Instead, it is humans that decide how to represent things, and not the things themselves. (2)

Places are not only mental constructs; they are concrete material locations with their own specific climates, history, architecture, "spatial and social dispositions", languages, sounds, smells, and tastes (Donald: 8). But we never experience "the real place", because "the thing itself" is always mediated to us.

Acts of invention and reconstruction are intensified in fictional representations of cities. By means of language, a novelist reconstructs aspects of the "real" cities and invents cityscapes. In her account of representations of the city entitled *City Codes*, Hana Wirth-Nesher points out that, sometimes, invented worlds themselves can be reflected in the physical cityscape. Some argue, for example, that London felt foggier after so many writers described it as such. Such a case is a consequence of an especially intense interaction of the "city as text" with representations of the city in the literary text (10). Wirth-Nesher points to the fact that the "real" city cannot be

experienced/read without mediation and a text in itself is partly composed of literary and artistic tropes (10). We do not just read the city; we negotiate its reality by imagining "the city". James Donald goes further in his assumptions by suggesting that the imagination precedes any distinction between fiction and truth, between illusion and reality. In a way, imagination, whether of the reader or writer, produces reality (8). Burton Pike in his book *The Image of The City in Modern Literature* looks at the ways different writers "produce" cities:

> Writers seem to pay careful attention to this difference between reality and image. For instance, though Flaubert, Hugo, Balzac, and Dickens have been praised for the realistic urban descriptions in their novels, close examination shows that they typically create in their fictions the Paris or London of a time considerably before the actual time of writing. Through the use of conventions governing verb tenses in narration, they give the impression of describing a present scene when they are actually inventing the picture of a past one. It is as if, by displacing the city backward in time in this fashion, they wish to ensure its metaphorization, to place it as firmly as possible in the realm of the imaginary while at the same time presenting it as a "reality". The result of this procedure is not the evocation of a historically past city but a palimpsestic impression, which results in a tension between the city as past and city as present. (13-14)

Writing the city

Cities are significantly more complex and intense than other places, and therefore offer an excellent material for the study of representation itself, as well as the relationship between people and their environment. The city has always been a subject of literary representation, although how a genre such as the novel has represented the urban landscape has evolved through years (Donald: 5).

In *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*, Richard Lehan argues that the city "has determined our cultural fate for the last three hundred years –

has become inseparable from our personal and national destiny" (3). He understands the modern city as a product of the optimistic belief in progress of the Enlightenment. Such thinkers as John Locke "saw wilderness as waste waiting to be reclaimed by commercial/industrial processes" (Lehan: 285). Based on these principles, the modern city has undergone a series of developmental transformations: from the stage of mercantilism and commercialism, through industrial imperialism to the "world city" of international capitalism and multinational corporations (286). In short, the structure of the city changed over centuries because its functions changed, as Lehan has remarked in a classification of urban literature intended to show how it has always reflected the physical evolution of the city: "comic and romantic realism give us insights into the commercial city; naturalism and modernism into the industrial city; and postmodernism into the postindustrial city" (289).

The Modern City. In the eighteenth century, the city was customarily imagined from the perspective of a hero in the context of certain narrative structures or themes, such as the opposition between the city and the country. Daniel Defoe was the first to portray the emerging commercial city of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later, Charles Dickens "reaffirmed a sense of community and tried to bring this world back to human scale through sentimental characters" (Lehan: 4). He gave us an insight into the early nineteenth-century urban world of industry, banking and exchange and into a time of the emergence of a new class and new lifestyles. His city was both "lure and trap" (39) and he saw how a materialistic approach to life "hardened the heart and diminished compassion, altering our sense of community" (4). Honoré de Balzac, by contrast, takes us to "the city limits" (58) in his realist

works, to the other side of capitalism: poverty and criminality. After him, the naturalist Emilè Zola described the new industrial city and the emergence of the proletariat. He "showed how modern urban institutions are really systems of control: over landscape, natural and industrial resources, over people themselves" (63).

In the nineteenth-century novel, the city was already looked at from multiple points of view. The plenitude and diversity of the bustling metropolis was organized through the omnipotent, panoptic narrator and presented as a complex but decipherable reality. Along with the greatest growth of the industrial metropolis of the late nineteenth century came a change in the perception of the city. Lehan argues that literary modernism created two urban realities: "the city as constituted by the artist, whose inner feelings and impressions embody an urban vision" and "the city as constituted by the crowd which had personality and urban meaning of its own" (71). The shift from objective to subjective perception of the city was in part a result of the new ways of conceptualizing it by historians and early sociologists such as Max Weber, Georg Simmel or Walter Benjamin. These sociologists recognized that the overstimulated modern urban self "was anchored only in consciousness; an object was created by the act of perceiving it. [...] The self became a bundle of sensory impressions precariously grouped together, its reality constantly threatened with dissolution" (77). For this reason, descriptive, impersonal and objective Realism and Naturalism gave way to detailed, personal, and subjective Impressionism. The artist became an urban observer "who brings his own distinct consciousness to the city" (77).

The urban *flâneur* that emerged in this context is without doubt a hero of the city and of modernism, a detached urban observer who wanders in the arcades and other commercial centers of nineteenth-century Paris. Yet, other social and literary figures such as the *blasé* or dandy, products of the consumer society and the new frenetic rhythm of city life, are also significant. The *blasé* and dandy seem to struggle in their own ways with the hyperstimulation and cacophony of the fragmentary, kaleidoscopic impulses of the intoxicating visual world of images. Conversely, the *flâneur* takes pleasure in the diversity of urban stimuli, visually consumes the transitory and fugitive images of modernity and, in this manner, appropriates the otherwise overdetermining and overwhelming world of excess that the late nineteenth-century metropolis became (Leach: 39). Elizabeth Wilson calls it a world of phantasmagoria: the dreamworld of urban spectacle of industrial capitalism that promises "consumption, the lure of pleasure and joy" (Wilson, 1995: 73).

The *flâneur*'s gaze is powerful in the sense that it is an attempt to control the world and possess the city visually. As an artist, the *flâneur* transforms reality, appropriates the city and attributes meaning to urban reality and his own existence within it. Nevertheless, his search for satisfaction can never be completed, because the metropolis offers an infinite number of commodified stimuli and there is always something new, always something alluring to gaze on, to interpret and make sense of. The *flâneur* as a literary figure, an artist observing the urban crowd, could only be born in Simmel's metropolis of intensified nervous stimuli. He does not feel alienation or a *blasé* attitude – he is there to absorb and comprehend the city at a distance. The perfect example, thoroughly examined by Walter Benjamin, is the lyric

subject of Charles Baudelaire, the observer who "identifies with the urban crowd, and then through a process of association and memory connects this impression with his own experience" (Lehan: 72).

In his analysis of the *flâneur*, Richard Lehan proposes that with this figure "we move inward from the street to the crowd, to an impression drawn from a crowd, to the associations that impression evokes in the mind" (72). In Burton Pike's opinion, however, this kind of shift can be described as a change from stasis to flux. A fixed, flat portrayal of static space gives way to the fluid vision influenced by inner impressions, changeable moods and consciousness. The individual, contrasted with the crowd, is placed against the community and collective space:

> As a result of this changed orientation the city in literature became fragmented [...] rather than tangible and coherent, a place consisting of bits, pieces, and shifting moods; it came to stand under the sign of discontinuity and dissociation rather than community. (Pike: 72)

The Postmodern City. On the whole, modernity leaves us with a writer who responds internally to the external stimuli of the metropolis, with cities, shaped by its perceivers, "made of desires and fears" (Pike: 127). In the twentieth century, the city as an independent reality began to be considered illegible and its representations no longer easily categorized in thematic units (as in the structure of Richard Lehan's book *The City in Literature*). First, the city was absorbed into a mental landscape, the observer's state of mind, and was therefore also unreal. Subsequently, it was no longer possible to make sense of the modern reality "of speed and artifice" (Best and Kellner: 14).

It is important to emphasize how urban environments changed, because these changes have a crucial role in the way contemporary cities are approached by writers. A new organization and the technological forms of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century "bring the era of a postindustrial global market economy" (Best and Kellner: 14). New modes of transportation and communications, new technologies and the new pace of (capitalist) life have altered the environment and, as a consequence, the way in which we view our surroundings. Most of the spatial consequences of the rapid globalization of the economy derive from acceleration in the processes of production, and in systems of distribution and consumption that result from overcoming spatial barriers and providing instantaneity and availability thanks to advances in telecommunications technology. David Harvey terms this phenomenon a time-space compression. Steven Best explains that it is only possible in the contemporary world "where long durations of time required for travel and communication are reduced to almost nothing and the vast, disparate spaces in the planet are absorbed into a homogenized global village" (Best: web page). Best argues that postmodernism emerges from the cultural disorientation provoked by the time-space compression.

In *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* Ghent Urban Studies Team (GUST) analyzes the numerous negative impacts of the overwhelming growth of contemporary metropolises, beginning with industrial pollution, traffic accidents, noise, and fear of crime and violence (139-42). Suburbanization provokes decentralization as well as spatial and social fragmentation and diversification of cities. There has also been a radical shift in the nature of public

and private space that has seen traditional public spaces privatized and collectivized in the form of shopping malls or theme parks that are not accessible to everyone, contrary to the traditional condition of public space. On the one hand, actual public spheres are being rapidly relocated to the virtual realm of mass media and cyberspace, while, on the other, private spaces, isolated and protected (sometimes in the form of walled or gated communities), serve public or semi-public purposes (88-89). At the same time, both, the time-space compression and spatial disorganization disorientate the immediate, physical experience of the metropolis and change perceptions of it (127-30) Urban space is no longer a "materially identifiable entity subjected to a proper spatial logic" (47) and "the city [...] [can] no longer be seen as a static arrangement of objects in a unitary space, but [has] to be approached as a non-place urban realm, a giant grid consisting of near-visible transportation and communication networks" (48).

This brief look at contemporary changes to the cityscape immediately puts the representation of the postmodern city in perspective. The city becomes unimaginable, requiring changes to the old conventions of representation, the old ways of imagining, and the old genres, so that contemporary literary images of the city provide a radical departure from all earlier urban paradigms, as Lehan remarks:

> For example, an existentialist like Jean-Paul Sartre, grounded in phenomenology, believes that consciousness (*pour soi*) brings the city (*en soi*) into being; [Jean] Baudrillard, in contrast, believes that consciousness comes into being within the systems that produce it. Mass media informs urban reality. The postindustrial city also takes its meaning from the complex handling of international capital and from the multinational corporation. Urban activity becomes more abstract and "unreal" as power operates from hidden sources. Such a city is at once a physical reality and a state of mind: to read the city is to read an urbanized self, to know the city from within. (287)

My concern in this context is how an urban space so radically changed can be approached in narration. According to Rob Shields "the time when real and imaginary were perfectly separate probably never existed" and "pure" reality is an analytical construct of competing representations that make the world of concrete and empirical interaction dynamic and alive (230). This is to say that places, cities and other urban areas exist only when they are represented, read, or given meaning, in other words, reflected upon. The merit of recent feminist, poststructuralist, postcolonial, cultural and discourse theorists, as Anthony King has pointed out, is to "have sharpen[ed] the tools of a self-reflective critique, deflecting attention away from the positivist tracking of, for example, the 'global' or 'world city' towards the more subjective issue of their discursive construction" (4). Poststructuralist theories (deconstruction, semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Foucaultian discourse theory and postmodern theories), he comments "seriously problematise the relationship between 'the real city, the discursive city (and) the disappearing city'"(3):

> The effect of this incestuous, intertextual implosion of representations where architecture becomes the subject of film, film the subject of history, history the subject of criticism, criticism the subject of deconstruction, deconstruction the subject of architecture, and so on ad infinitum, is the emergence of a situation where [...] 'the boundary between social reality and representations of that reality has collapsed'. (3)

Jean Baudrillard has termed "hyperreality", the condition that explains the domination of contemporary media and communication culture by the simulation and saturation of images. Best and Kellner explain that the commodity society of nineteenth-century capitalism structured around commodity spectacles and consumption has evolved from "the society of *spectacle* to the society of *simulacrum*,

paralleled by increasing commodification and massification to the point of implosion" (80). Recognizing this change, Baudrillard challenges a semiological model of understanding reality, and claims that objects and discourses have lost their firm grounding, the signifying referent (signified). Neil Leach reminds us that, in the world of today, Marshall McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message" means that the signifier becomes its own referent, and, in consequence, the image supplants reality (209). From such a perspective, a city is transformed into a flood of images that move us away from the original. As Kellner and Best explain, the virtual or simulated representations put *the real* at a distance and, as a consequence, "it is confused with its copies or even devalued in light of them" (101).

The postmodern "dissolution of the social and the real" (Best and Kellner: 105) certainly influences notions of mimesis: the realist reflection of the world has faded away. Although Baudrillard's theories are somewhat apocalyptic or extreme, they make us aware of the fact that we never experience city space in an unmediated form, but that it is always symbolized and metaphorized. Visual, non-discursive signifiers that refer to some other signified constitute the symbolic level of representation defined in terms of specific ideologies or particular social, political, economic and cultural circumstances. However, the city is never a purely social, symbolic, or mental construction. It is all of this at the same time, because it is a "palimpsest of its representations in any number of cultural discourses" (Donald: 11), a definition that does not ascribe a sense of coherence or integrity to the city itself or to the image of it represented in literature. The city may be considered a process rather than just a concrete, physical reality (Resina and Ingenschay: xii). As Bart

Keunen remarks, industry, social mobility, consumption, social isolation, and class conflict (and their consequences) are no longer the themes of urban literature. Postmodern authors

> concentrate on the artificial and fabricated character of confrontations with the social world. The city of postmodernism is first and foremost a semiotic world, reduced to an immaterial existence, to a "storehouse of both individual and collective phantasies". Not the empirical city as such is the big challenge for the contemporary author, but the fictional constructs, which we use trying to comprehend the urban world – the world of simulacra and of the mediatized global village arising from the urban condition. (373)

There is no doubt that changes in the economy and politics of contemporary capitalism have transformed the city physically and socially. While an analysis of socio-economic transformation of the postmodern metropolis is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is importanmt to recognize that, by relativizing Culture itself and, consequently, the notion of representation, these changes have seriously problematised the possibilities of "writing" the city in literature. The gap between perception and representation has significantly widened in the dynamism and diversity of contemporary metropolises.

Reading the city

City as text. In his essay on semantic approaches to the city "Semiology and the Urban", Roland Barthes conceives the city as "a true text, as an inscription of man in space" (167). Consequently, the urban subject has to discover the meaning of the city "simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it" (168). Barthes proposes a semiological approach as a way to deconstruct the symbolic language and codes of the city texts. But when trying to segment the urban text into significant

units, the readers must always be aware of the instability of their discoveries, given that "symbolism must be defined essentially as the world of signifiers, of correlations [...] that we can never enclose in a full signification, in a final signification" (170). Barthes reminds us that the city reader, instead of elaborating "the lexicon of the significations" (169) of city signs based on the historical and culturally conventional correspondence between signifiers (objects in the environment) and signifieds (the concepts they recall), should seek the complexities and instabilities beneath the apparent simplicity. This is because "the signifieds are transient", "like mythical creatures, extremely imprecise, and at a certain point they always become signifieds of something else", while the signifiers remain the same and "the hunt for the signified can thus constitute only a provisional approach" (169). James Duncan remarks that it is impossible then to achieve a satisfactory interpretation of the urban landscape, because it "is a text in which signifiers become signifieds in an endless chain of metaphors" (Duncan: 26). This means that the city reader should try to understand the play of signs and be aware of their arbitrariness and the multiple possibilities of their meaning. A city dweller who reads the text of the city is faced with inaccessibility. Knowing that, each landscape consists of

> partial visibilities and manifold possibilities [...] The city dweller learns to contend with the sensation of partial exclusion, of being an outsider, by mental reconstruction of areas to which he or she no longer has access, and also by inventing worlds to replace those that are inaccessible. (Wirth-Nesher: 9).

Reading the city is thus a creative act, multiple and varied, so that a total representation of the city is impossible.

City in a text. Literary authors also read the city text and create literary cities in their novels. According to Hana Wirth-Nesher, authors usually draw on maps, street names, and existing buildings, and landmarks in their fictive reconstruction of the "real" city "enabling a character to turn the corner of a verifiable street on the map, to place him in a *realistic* setting" (10). Given the description of easily seen and recognizable urban phenomena, a reader can connect this image to a whole repertoire of meanings characteristic of a particular culture. The novelist "draws on a repertoire of urban tropes inherited from previous literature, tropes that have secured a place for themselves in the literary or artistic tradition" (Wirth-Nesher: 10). The city is a palimpsest of the history of its representation in art, religion, and politics in any number of cultural discourses. However, when referring to a "discontinuity between the empirical city and its fictional counterpart", Burton Pike does not mean to suggest that the writer who uses a certain image has in mind "a secret, coded meaning which the reader is challenged to decipher" (13-14).

Any attempt at researching a literary image of place, or "reading" a literary city, may fall into the trap of looking at the image mimetically. Geographers often interpret literary texts as transcriptions of concrete human experiences, a straightforward and objective mirror of reality, without taking into account that they are textual representations. This issue is addressed in depth in Marc Brosseau's essay "Geography's Literature", where he identifies many problems that occur when Literature meets Geography. Since the 1970s, literary accounts of a "sense of place" as well as personal experiences of places have been examined by geographers to "help to grasp the personality of a region by providing 'a synthesis, a living picture of

the unity of people and place'" (Brosseau: 335). These accounts tend to be treated as reliable sources of information, but overlook their quality as narrative works of fiction:

> Literary texts are not *literalist* texts: they do not attempt or claim to represent the 'reality' of the world or even of human experience in the authoritative sense that geographical or social-scientific texts do. Geographers have too often used literary texts to answer previously determined research questions, ignoring the formal construction of the texts, and the ways that various representative tropes narrate places. In other words, geography becomes the dominant discourse and literary theory is ignored. (Stainer: 166)

Brosseau calls for a more attentive and, therefore, a more productive analysis of literary texts: theoretical or aesthetical considerations, examination of the functions of the text, and different ways of producing and subverting the meaning (Brosseau: 338-39). This is especially important in the case of postmodern novels that often challenge the genre itself, while being open-ended and allowing the possibility of multiple meanings (Stainer: 166). When looking at literary works, we have to remember that literature is not the experience itself and cannot be taken as a straightforward and objective representation of it. It is only a discourse about an experience mediated by literary and language conventions (Brosseau: 340), and its meanings are often disruptive or subversive.

The *flâneur*'s gaze

The *flâneur* is a figure that facilitates a good understanding of the issues of writing and reading the city. Of course, it is a social type, historically bounded to the reality of late nineteenth-century Paris. It is a figure related to the practices of precise places: the arcades, galleries, and *les passages* of Paris. As such, it is a social product of

particular historical and political conditions. He is, comments Keith Tester, "a man *of* the crowd as opposed to the man *in* the crowd", "the center of an order of things of his own making, even though, to others, he appears to be just one constituent part of the metropolitan flux" (3).

The *flâneur,* an urban observer, is driven from the private to the public in search of meaning. The realm of the private cannot provide existential completion and satisfaction because to live in an enclosure of private interests implies an isolated, unproductive *being*. *Flânerie,* by contrast, is *doing*, not just simply looking, but observing, studying and analyzing reality. David Frisby points out that *flânerie* as an activity consists of a sensual observation and reading of metropolitan life and people, carefully listening to the sounds and fragments of stories of city dwellers and the places they inhabit, for example (95-97). It is a methodology for everyday exploration, deciphering and understanding the city and the experience of modernity; a methodology of "reading the traces from details" (99) that sometimes is compared to the practices of a detective, a collector, ragpicker or historical investigator of society.

When a *flâneur* produces the texts that reflect his readings of the city, he becomes the artist-*flâneur*, of which the primary example is, as Walter Benjamin described him in *A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* Charles Baudelaire, the poet of Paris. According to Parkhurst Ferguson, the *flâneur* "walks through the city at random and alone, a bachelor or widower [...] suspended from social obligation, disengaged, disinterested, dispassionate" (26). He observes the crowd at a distance,

but also forms an integral part of the spectacle of city life, an independent urban figure who

> sounds very much like an author in search of characters and intrigue. An entire novel can spring from a single encounter observed in the street. [...] This connection to the imagination and the intellect justifies the *flâneur*'s literary claims even as it sets him apart from the vulgar idlers and gapers [...]. (28)

Although initially a hero of modern Paris, this recurring literary figure of a "man *of* the crowd" should also be approached in the context of the contemporary metropolis. The changes in the uses of urban space alluded to earlier clearly show that in the postmodern metropolis there is no place for the social figure of the *flâneur*, a disenchanted stroller. His powerful position as an independent observer is expropriated by a much more determined one: the consumer. Once expelled from the crowded streets and arcades, *flânerie* takes refuge in the exclusive department stores where it loses its independent character and potential for "crowd practice" (Shields, 1994: 65).

Later in the twentieth century, time-space compression transforms the world into a global village connected by a network of communication technologies, where face-to-face contact loses its importance. Urban dwellers are more inclined to rely on electronic forms of interaction, and the virtual world takes on the role of actual public space. In this changed environment, the *flâneur* is immobilized in the safe interiors, where *other-directed* free walking becomes a consumption-oriented search for the product. After the department stores come the automobile, highway development, and free-flow traffic. The streets and other traditional public spaces (squares, cafes, salons and clubs) cease to provide a locus for human interaction. Public space, traditionally

conceived as meeting place, is "dismantled" and dematerialized (GUST: 88-9). With the advent of communication technologies, it is displaced to the realm of mass media, and can no longer be physically mapped. In order to grasp what the place of the *flâneur* is in a postmodern world, we may refer to Zygmunt Bauman's theory of *flânerie* as game. In his article "Desert Spectacular", Bauman explains that play is the *flâneur*'s mode of life. The *flâneur* is in fact a "traveling solitary player" (145) in full control of the game he plays and sets rules for. The game's aim is to "rehearse contingency of meaning" and conjure attractive, somehow utopic order:

> A dream order, of a kind all orders promise to be but few keep their promise: an order that enables, empowers, comes complete with that "knowledge of how to go on". (145)

The new urban dream worlds that substituted traditional public spaces, as well as the emerging virtual world of cyberspace, "expropriated the *flâneur*'s own right and capacity to invent the rules of the game he would play and to supervise their execution" (150). With the example of fantasy places such as Disneyland or West Edmonton Mall, Bauman (150-53) explains how such consumer fantasy places that are more "real" than reality, offer a pre-determined meaning to its visitors:

> Disneyland and its earnest imitations are instances of the degenerate utopia of life as *flâneurisme* [...]. Blatantly and unashamedly, it presents the dream as reality that from the start has become meticulously disguised as a play: reality and fantasy, living and playing have changed places. [...] The designed reality has the advantage over the messy one outside in being custom-made to suit the *flâneur*'s whims: no risks here of slipping inadvertently out of the game, of going on playing while the game is over. Here, the game never ends. The game is the only reality there is [...]. (151)

Postmodern consumers are offered the never-ending possibility of dreaming and playing in the reality of fantasy places (including cyberspace) where everything is

possible, while avoiding the "real reality", unsafe and transitory. Bauman observes that the "*flâneur*'s play has become now the standard by which all reality is to be measured" (151). That very remark places the *flânerie* outside its original historical time-frame of modernity.

Although public space has significantly changed and the social figure, the *flâneur* of Paris, is gone, the practice of *flânerie* remains as a creative way of appropriating and making meaning. James Donald considers *flânerie* as a critical method of reflection about the world characterized by a close reading, and a perceptive observation of the city (45). Barry Smart adds to that argument:

> If the figure of the *flâneur* has disappeared, *flânerie* as a form of being in the modern metropolis seems to endure. [...] Where the nineteenth-century *flâneur* loitered self-consciously around the signs of consumption, the twentieth-century consumer of signs embraces and expresses *flânerie* as a necessary mode of being-in-the-world. The marginal figure of the *flâneur* [...] may have gone, but the perceptive attitude, which he embodied, saturates modern existence. (161-62)

The *flâneur*'s gaze is powerful in the sense of being an act of control over the world or the visual possession of the city, but the flux of images accounts for only a momentary satisfaction, since it is also a reason for profound dissatisfaction. The phantasmagoric promise of the urban spectacle seems destined to disappoint:

> *Flânerie* is a form of perception [...] preserved in the characteristic fungibility of people and things in mass society, and in the merely imaginary gratification provided by advertising, illustrated journals, fashion and sex magazines, all of which go by the *flâneur*'s principle of 'look, but don't touch'. (Buck Morss quoted in Smart: 73)

Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson draws an analogy between the practice of *flânerie* and the Lévi-Straussian practice of *bricolage*, the latter being the production of "new and unexpected connections in a serious kind of play" (30). *Bricolage* is a creative

process of using whatever things, images, ideas are available in a given moment, regardless of their immediate purpose, in order to create a new, original, and unforeseen work of art or literature. Just as the *bricoleur*, the *flâneur* reads city life phenomenologically and symbolically, collects spatial images through his gaze and makes observations in order to later recombine them into new and original texts full of surprising associations and new meanings (Makaryk: 404). It is important to remember that the *flâneur*'s responses to the physical city involve the observer's own cultural background, memories and associations. Anke Gleber suggests that the *flâneur* "personifies" a perspective linked to the phenomena of tourism, photography, and psychoanalysis by

> serving above all as a visual medium of perception and subjectivity in human form. He represents a disposition that is closely affiliated with the gaze of the camera, renders the sensitivity of a director who records his own vision, and repeats the spectatorship of a moviegoer who perceives the images of reality as an ongoing film [...]. (6)

Flânerie can thus be considered as an activity of producing the city as a text and the city in a text, the latter referring to any kind of textual image of the city: narrative, journalistic, or sociological. On the one hand, through *flânerie* as a mode of thought and a form of perception, the city reader can experience a contemporary metropolis because it proposes the practice of a careful reading that invites a reader to pay attention to every detail and to the diversities of meaning of the urban milieu. On the other hand, through *flânerie* as a mode of constructive approach to the city text, the city can be represented in art as a *bricolage* or palimpsest assembled together from individual observations and cultural images of the artist. Deborah Parsons remarks that the urban writer is not only a figure within the city but also

> the producer of the city, one that is related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone, one that results from the interconnection of body, mind, and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity. The writer adds other maps to the city atlas; those of social interaction but also of myth, memory, fantasy, and desire. (1)

Female *flânerie*

As a social figure of the nineteenth-century the *flâneur* was necessarily a bourgeois male and women were either repressed or marginalized from the exclusively male public space of the city. According to D'Souza and McDonough, the literature of modernity did not see the possibility of the feminine version of the masculine hero: "the solitary and independent life of the *flâneur* was not open to women" (3), who could only be considered objects of pleasureable looking for men (6). However, one cannot discuss *flânerie* without examining the implications and reasons of the absence/invisibility of the female version of the *flâneur*. The idea of the *flâneuse* and the question whether female *flânerie* was possible as a social practice in late nineteenth-century Paris has been widely discussed by critics and it has to be considered while discussing *flânerie* as a possible critical method of approaching the city.

Janet Wolff's 1985 essay on "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" prompted a discussion about the figure of the *flâneuse*. In her reading, the *flâneuse* was inherently invisible in modern literature, because women at that time were absent from public life, confined to the private space of home. Her firm position sparked a debate. Many critics who had focused on the role of women in culture and society contended that the fact that women in modern

literature did not appear in the public sphere (unless they were prostitutes, widows, or murder victims) did not mean they were non-existent in public life of the modern metropolis. Since the opening of the first department stores especially, women could legitimately spend time outside their homes shopping and cinema-going and even though they had a restricted access to public life "women [could] be seen occupying public positions in the city from the mid-nineteenth century that locate them as observers" (Parsons: 5).

Critical studies of various forms of female presence in the modern city and its public sphere have shown that the simplistic explanation of the absence of the *flâneuse* in modern literature due to the division of public and private space as territories of men and women respectively is not sufficient. One example of such in-depth criticism is Deborah Parsons' book *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000). She offers a critical approach to the ideas of Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock, who both explain the lack of the female *flâneur* in modern literature as a result of the inaccessibility of public life. Parsons asserts:

> To infer from the socio-historical position of bourgeois women as confined to private realm that it is therefore a priori impossible to conceive a female aesthetic perspective in terms of the concept of flânerie is false. Wolff and Pollock both overlook the *flâneur*'s inherent contradictions, perhaps as a result of their tendency to blur historical actuality with its use as a cultural, critical phenomenon. (5)

Parsons argues that the activity of urban observation was not exclusively a privilege of the male, which leads to the conclusion that women's experience of the city was simply different from the experience of man, but it definitely existed:

> Whereas Benjamin's *flâneur* increasingly becomes a metaphor for observation, retreating from the city street once the arcades are destroyed to a place of scopic authority yet static detachment, women were entering

> the city with fresh eyes, observing it from within. It is with its social influx of women as empirical observers into the city streets that aesthetic, urban perception as a specifically masculine phenomenon is challenged. (6)

While Parsons presents an empirical evidence of the presence of women in public life as well as the examples of marginalized women's fiction that provides such an account, her point is to actually go beyond social discussion and argue for a "particular mode of female urban vision" (6).

Similarly, years after her initial article and in response to the criticism, Janet Wolff revisits her idea of the invisible *flâneuse* in her 2006 article "Gender and the Haunting of Cities (or, the Retirement of the Flâneur)", where she tries to reconcile various approaches to the im/possibility of a female *flâneur*. She still argues that the literature of modernity provided an idealized image of the subject, a modernist hero, and that historians and sociologists have produced a unilateral, male view of modern life "deciding to focus on the public sphere – on the street and the urban space – and in privileging the figure of the *flâneur*", making the domestic space "of backyards in which family life takes place" invisible (2006: 22-3). But, while recognizing yet again these restrictions, she also wants to move beyond the discussion of their implications:

> Of course there *is* a city, and there *are* public and private spaces. And of course in the modern city of the early twentieth century these spaces were in many ways gendered, but [...] if we take "the city" or "the public sphere" as already given, clearly identifiable social facts, we are doomed to the depressing (and ultimately rather boring) point of view, which perceives only exclusions and absences. If, instead, we understand "the city" as itself a discursive construct, and "the public" (and "private") as narrative device, we may begin to entertain counter-narratives to confront the "shadows and obscurities", the dark silences, and the ghosts. (28)

Wolff suggests that we "ask the *flâneur* to cede his position in the center of the stage, and to take up, instead, a place on margins, as just one of the city's inhabitants" (24).

Similarly, she asks for a reorientation of points of view on the *flâneuse*. Instead of focusing on the public/private binary, she wants to see her in the actual context of her life (25) and explore the practices of her everyday city experience.

Deborah Parsons points out that both the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* are moving observers, "indeed more specifically walking observers, whose movement has autonomy even if not direction" (224). In the contemporary fleeting and variable urban landscape

> the motion of *flânerie* reflects the fleeting aspect of the modern, yet this motion is one of walking, of human, as opposed to technological movement. In this aspect *flânerie* parallels with the idea of the search, and in the abstract wandering in the city this search would seem to be not for place but for self and identity. *Flânerie* can thus be interpreted as an attempt to identify and place the self in the uncertain environment. (41)

Therefore, contemporary *flânerie* is a practice of "walking in the [...] city [...], imagining its past and prophesying its future [...] observing the fragments of urban life through its past, its present, and the minds of its inhabitants" (Parsons: 224).

Female *flânerie* differs from the categorizing, possessing gaze of the masculine observer and can offer additional, important insights into the analysis of the experience of the city. The *flâneuse*'s city is often very subjective, elusive and ambiguous, because, as she goes about her everyday business, she slows down to absorb the city through all her senses, and, above all, without detaching her personal feelings and emotions from the experience of place. The female geography of the city is therefore also the map of her emotions articulated in terms of their socio-spatial mediation.

CHAPTER 3

BUENOS AIRES AT HOME AND AWAY

> Borges [...] declared "I've always been and always will be in Buenos Aires". It is a city that foreshadows all others. You never leave it entirely, you keep rebuilding it through the faded snapshots that your memory throws up. (Wilson: vii)

Literary Buenos Aires

In *Ciudad y literatura en América Latina* José Carlos Rovira asks about Buenos Aires: "¿Puede una ciudad ser sobre todo literatura?" (212). He sees the Argentinean capital not only as an important topic in Argentinean culture, but also as an omnipresent image in Latin American literature:

> [...] fundada en 1536 sobre un territorio virgen, vuelta a fundar en 1580, sólo alcanzará la condición de ciudad medio desarrollada a fines del XVIII, cuando se crea el Virreinato del Río de la Plata en 1776, y será el siglo XIX, y sobre todo el XX, el que unirá a un fuerte desarrollo urbano una conciencia literaria y cultural de la ciudad que recreará los signos y espacios hasta el punto de que podremos hablar de *una tercera fundación de Buenos Aires: universalizada por una literatura, o por fenómenos musicales, poéticos y citadinos como el tango, la ciudad vive como exponente universal de sí misma,* capital de un territorio inmenso en el que se diferencia fuertemente la vida social de la que se ha vivido y vive en la capital política. (212; my emphasis)

From very early on, Buenos Aires has been a subject of description in literary texts. Foundational novels of Argentinean literature have created a powerful image of the city that is recognized around the world: the city of tango and immigrant nostalgia, the Paris of the South. Naturally, socio-historical conditions in Buenos Aires have been evolving throughout the centuries and its literary image has

responded to these transformations. The early romantic vision of the city presented in opposition to the country has been followed by realist and naturalist accounts of the growing metropolis and, later, by more subjective descriptions of the modern city through the *flâneur*'s eyes. Buenos Aires has also been used as a metaphor for particular aspects of the human condition in the modern world. These different representations of the city correspond to the physical and socio-historical changes it has undergone, and the move from the objective to more subjective representations are consistent with the gradual changes in the ways literature represents reality.

One element of Buenos Aires history that has to be considered when discussing the literary city, because it has shaped the culture of the country and its capital to a great extent, is immigration. The end of the nineteenth century saw big waves of newcomers, mainly from Europe, who significantly changed and enriched the culture of the city. The arrival of so many outsiders was echoed in literary production and the image of Buenos Aires acquired the quality of a place of exile, melancholy and nostalgia, a place where everyone is an outsider. Later, in the second half of the twentieth century, when Argentina suffered periods of dictatorship, Buenos Aires also became "a city of absences", because of the many people who "'disappeared', [had] been kidnapped, tortured, killed or forced into exile" (Wilson: viii). Political exile from Argentina during the military dictatorship of 1976-1983, as well as the exile caused by a difficult economic situation in the country during the years that followed, became a significant factor in the cultural life of the country. Many writers also left Argentina and continued writing from abroad, contributing particularly interesting percspectives by representing Buenos Aires as an absent city

that was still present in the identity of the displaced person and was frequently revisited through memories. Among the writers were many women who engaged the city of their past while in exile, reinventing it and themselves as they imagined their home place from the perspective of an outsider.

Before considering their situation more precisely, however, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the evolution of the literary representation of Buenos Aires and its images of exile and absence as a point of departure for my analysis of the relationship between the city and its inhabitants with an emphasis how a *flâneuse* experiences the city.

Early Visions of Buenos Aires. An example of the early glimpse at Buenos Aires can be found in a romantic story *Amalia* (1844), a novel by José Mármol written during the Juan Manuel de Rosas period (1829-1852) that included a civil war. *Amalia* provides one of the first descriptions of the city and presents Buenos Aires in a positive light, as a nostalgic evocation from exile of the city before the time of Rosas (Gostautas: 150), but this image is opposed by the negative images of the city in the time of oppression in 1850. In his 1963 article "An Introduction to the Literature on Buenos Aires and Its Inhabitants" Ernest Lewald notes that "although it is a novel in the romantic tradition", which implies a certain level of picturesque embellishment, it contains a number of "costumbrista" episodes that reveal aspects of a "*porteño* society" that are perceived as negative (161).

One of the first realistic portraits of Buenos Aires is presented in "El matadero", written by Esteban Echeverría between 1838-1840 and published in 1871.

Here, a real place, a slaughterhouse, "el matadero del Sur" is used as a symbol of Juan Manuel de Rosas' Buenos Aires of chaos, violence and brutality (Wilson: 200). A grim picture of the city was Echeverría's way of denouncing "the brutality of the dictator Rosas and his henchmen who had established a reign of terror in the young capital before the middle of the nineteenth century" (Lewald: 161). Betty Rice Yung explains that Echeverría's "realistic portrayal of such items as language, dress, particular streets and sections of the city, and customs" presents Buenos Aires of the 1830s in a negative light as a "focal point of the political and economic changes" (40) of the new republic.

From Village to City: The Birth of the Colossus. After the civil war (1859), Buenos Aires began to grow very fast demographically and economically, and to gain political and cultural supremacy over the rest of the country. When, in 1880, it was declared the capital, it was still "a big village", but on its way to becoming the big metropolis, the Paris of the South, with its cafés, clubs, shopping galleries, and great architecture. The urban novel reappears with *La Gran Aldea: costumbres bonaerenses* (1884) by Lucio Vicente López, which describes Buenos Aires nostalgically, evoking images from before its feverish period of growth when it was a big picturesque village (Gostautas: 151). It is also a literary account of the "transformation from village to metropolis that tries hard to be a carbon copy of Paris, even if it means to imitate its shortcomings" (Lewald: 162). Lewald remarks that López "introduced a number of secondary characters that [...] represent a *composite picture of the capital's society*" (162, my emphasis), a "costumbrista technique" used often in other

realistic accounts of the city. López's title "became a set phrase, a nostalgic synonym for the city [...] that has mutated into the richest city in Latin America" (Wilson: 18). One of López's examples of this significant mutation is in the way the original *porteño* shops gave way to modern, luxurious, and elegant gallerias similar to those in Paris and other European cities. In the end, the cityscape of the growing metropolis of Buenos Aires was no longer the village it used to be, giving rise to feelings of nostalgia and sadness.

Realist and Naturalist Images of the Monstrous City. Between 1895 and 1912 the population of Argentina doubled thanks to immigration, and Buenos Aires continued to develop very rapidly (Wilson: 18). The phenomenal growth of the city at the turn of the century and its cultural dominance in the nation's life has encouraged Argentine authors to "eulogize, decry, dissect, or merely to mirror their great Colossus" (Yung: 4). Early naturalist portraits of the city, found in Manuel Gálvez's *Nacha Régules* (1919) and *Historia de arrabal* (1922), have a documentary character and record historical and social phenomena. Gálvez's Buenos Aires "is submerged in a pit where red lights illuminate human suffering and depravity, much in the fashion of Emile Zola's naturalistic novels" (Lewald: 162). The view of realists and naturalists is superficial "with the city serving as a forum for social protest and as a convenient background for an encapsulated vision of a nation in formation" (Yung: 199). In realist and naturalist novels, streets, neighbourhoods or squares are meticulously described, but they do not relate to a character's spiritual life. The image of the city is enriched by the detailed and vivid descriptions of characters such as "el

compadrito, el fronterizo, el pícaro, el rufián y el inmigrante" (Gostautas: 151), but there is no inner/personal interdependence between the urban landscape and them (Gnutzmann: 48). The tendency is rather to personify the city by attributing it a power to shape the lives of its inhabitants (city as a monster), or to present the city as a "sum total of what its inhabitants feel and do" (Yung: 64).

Buenos Aires has always been represented as "civilization" in opposition to the "barbarism" of the countryside, and it has served as an example for various sociological analyses of Argentinean society. In 1933, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada published *La radiografía de la pampa*,

> a collection of sociological observations that attempt to evaluate the respective spheres of influence of the capital and the interior. Martínez-Estrada finds that the man from Buenos Aires is divorced from his hinterland and its traditions since he turned away from it, in order to recreate in succession the cultural atmosphere of Madrid, [or] Paris [...]. (Lewald: 162)

Estrada's other book, *La cabeza de Goliat* (1940), presents the cultural abyss between the capital and the provinces, and "the author reports on changing values and mores of the 'porteño', a process now linked to the spectacular rise of modern technology" (Lewald: 163). However, the opposition of the city and the country has also been presented as a romanticised glorification of the country and gaucho life in contrast to the sordidness of the huge metropolis (Gostautas: 150).

Beyond Realism: The Flâneur in Buenos Aires. Although Roberto Arlt's images of Buenos Aires in *El juguete rabioso* (1926), *Los siete locos* (1929), *Los lanzallamas* (1931), *El amor brujo* (1932) and *Aguafuertes porteñas* (1933) are considered realist accounts, his rough and colloquial descriptions are often surreal, and offer a different

view of the city and its subjects. Without doubt, Arlt captures the reality of the city of the early decades of the twentieth century, the times that Michele Aynesworth calls "turbulent and exciting" as a result of "the dizzying currents of popular culture as wave upon wave of immigrants swept over the Latin American capital" (2). Buenos Aires of these times is introduced to electricity, subways, telephones, radio, railway stations, skyscrapers and many influences from all around the world through numerous immigrants (2). Robert Arlt feels "stimulated by newness and speed and variety", but at the same time he is "obsessed by the question of what happens to the outsider, the down-and-outer, the anxious human being caught up in the turmoil" (2). His characters are like that: wandering *flâneurs* on the outside, lost in the huge, chaotic and hostile metropolis, observing its new appearance. In his article "La Buenos Aires de Borges y de Arlt", Blas Matamoro compares Arlt's representations of the city to those found in Borges' poetry and prose. Although the style of both authors is very different (the elegant, poetic language of Borges is the opposite of Arlt's colloquial speech and use of lunfardo), Matamoro makes it clear that both, Borges and Arlt, do not present the city in a realistic way but rather create an imaginary city that nurture the "*porteño* myth":

> Si se compara la Buenos Aires de Borges y Arlt con la de los novelistas y poetas del realismo, documentados y puntuales, las diferencias saltan a la vista. La actitud realista [...] propone un discurso contemporáneo de lo que el escritor observa, porque la realidad que le interesa "está ahí", presente, al alcance de la mano y de la palabra. Pero Borges y Arlt señalan una Buenos Aires del delirio y el fantasma, apéndice de un manojo de lecturas, consciente de ser y hacer algo literario. Aunque su gesticulación pueda parecer a rachas realista, su verdad conceptual no lo es. (Matamoro: 285)

Roberto Arlt's protagonists, adds Aynesworth, wander aimlessly around Buenos Aires like Parisian *flâneurs*, trying to "bridge the gap" between their "exuberant

imagination and the sordid reality around [them]"(4). An excellent example is Silvio, the main character of the novel *El juguete rabioso* (1926), who feels overwhelmed by the wealth of a city like Buenos Aires, so "rich in pesos, rich in immigrants, rich in languages, rich in culture" (Aynesworth: 6):

> He must negotiate a fiercely competitive urban maze, bombarded at every turn by the babble of voices, the glut of narratives, the petty meanness of others. In a sense he is a plaything of the city. Primarily through his nocturnal, underworld adventures, he comes to know the madness and inhumanity – the poverty, privation, and cruel exploitation – that flourish amid the chaos. Arlt's use of an episodic structure is ideal for conveying the fragmented nature of these experiences. (6)

In a way, chaotic Buenos Aires becomes a state of mind for Silvio, whose recurrent interior monologues, filled with various fantasies and daydreams intertwined with experiences of the harsh and sordid reality of the city, reflect his inner chaos. When Arlt's characters "view their surroundings, both the external details of their observations (the ugliness of the buildings), and the imagined, internal ones (the ideas behind the faces) project the most sordid concept of urban life" (Yung 66-67).

The Buenos Aires of Jorge Luis Borges, who described real and imaginary places and presented a complex image of the city (Rovira: 234), is just as much an exterior reality as an interior geography. It is said that Buenos Aires was "mythically founded" in his poetry (*Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1923) and other prose works. Matamoros notes that Borges' city

> tiene un centro mítico que es el barrio de Palermo, que él conoció de niño a través de las rajas de su casa [...]. Lo intuyó y lo inventó, poblando de arcáicos cuchilleros que se matan sin motivo [...]. Luego, el barrio Sur, con sus caserones coloniales. Y, en la noche, las callecitas despobladas del arrabal y desperdigados almacenes donde se oye la conversación de los jugadores de naipes y algún rasgueo de guitarra. Se trata de una ciudad fantasmal, por la que deambulan los espectros de sus antepasados guerreros, escapados de alguna tumba en el cementerio patricio de la

> Recoleta. No lo atraen las calles bulliciosas del centro en el barrio Norte con sus palacetes de nuevos ricos. [...] Como en Arlt, el viaje es por los restos del pasado, la caza de la Buenos Aires que se extingue y se borra en la infinitud chata de la llanura. (283)

Borges wanted Buenos Aires to stay the way it used to be until the beginning of the twentieth century, unaffected by modern changes. His poetic city images are therefore infiltrated by that desire. Beatriz Sarlo explains that Borges creates the city that is untouched by aggressive modernity (34) as there is no place for futuristic ideals in his poetic descriptions. He identifies with Buenos Aires of the past, the total city whose spaces also serve as a pretext to theorize on the urban human condition.

The City As A Metaphor. In her study of the image of the city in the works of Argentinean authors of the twentieth century such as Eduardo Mallea, Leopoldo Marechal, and Ernesto Sabato, Betty Rice Yung explains that the authors are neither far from considering the city as mere decorative background nor from using it as an illustration of social development. Their perception and interpretation of the city is focused on reciprocal relations between the city of Buenos Aires as a rapidly developing organism and its inhabitants or creators. For this reason, authors strive to reproduce, externally and internally, the "total city" or the "personalized city" (13). Interestingly, the chapters that analyze the novels of Mallea, Marechal and Sabato are entitled respectively: "the city as desert", "the city as inferno", and "the city as Babylonia". In each case, the city becomes a metaphor that functions as a reflection of the author's philosophy and beliefs.

Eduardo Mallea, essayist and novelist, was "deeply concerned with the destiny of the countless men and women that rush through the streets of the big city,

alone with their ambitions and frustrations" (Lewald: 163) and strived for a self-knowledge. He wrote, among others *La ciudad junto al río inmóvil* (1936), *La bahía del silencio* (1940), and *La red* (1968), novels in which the presence of Buenos Aires is not accidental, but serves in each case as a symbolic metaphor for the interior human condition. En *La red*, for example, the city is presented as a labyrinth of highways and streets, or as a "young, attractive, but cold-natured woman" (Yung: 113). As such, urban space becomes a metaphor of the condition of a man trapped in the net of his obsessions (Santamaría: 288). In *La ciudad junto al río inmóvil,* the "desert is an appropriate symbol for the discordant relation of city man to his environment" (Yung: 103). The city is seen as an asphalt wasteland that "acts as a barrier to those who seek their genuine spiritual identity" (103).

Adan Buenosayres (1948) by Leopoldo Marechal is an odyssey through a real city (*porteño* life is described in detail) symbolizing the experiences of human life (125). Ernesto Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1973) is another example of the representation of urban reality that serves as a basis to ask "metaphysical questions such as the meaning of existence, solitude, and death" (158) In all these novels, the apparent reality of the city "is not objective, it is filtered through the emotions, the subconscious, and even the transrational unconscious of the troubled minds" (186). Betty Rice Yung explains that the visions of the city presented in the novels of these authors exemplify a new trend in urban literature that is characterized by the emphasis on "man and his governing psychology, including the rational and irrational forces", a profound analysis of the city in search of its identity, and a universal approach to its locality (200).

Yung also comments, citing Malva Filer in her remarks, on the writings of Julio Cortázar, explaining that it is often excluded from the study of the Argentinean urban novel, because

> it deals with a more universal vision of man looking for meaning and reason in the chaos of Western civilization. The object of man's journey is similar in Mallea, Marechal and Sábato, but their search is conducted in a specific atmosphere – Buenos Aires – with great stress on what it means to be a part of that particular society. [...] in Cortázar "'la ciudad' puede estar en París o en cualquier parte. Es un estado de ánimo, una aventura del espíritu, un otro cielo". (11)

Cortázar's novels such as *El examen* (1986) and various short stories, "Casa tomada" (1969) for example, are set in Buenos Aires, but they could, as Yung explains, "equally occur in Paris, or in other Latin American cities [...] supporting the idea of life in the city as being a mental experience, or a state of mind" (11). In other words, Cortázar's approach to the city may serve as a basis for reflection on the socio-cultural aspects of the city life experiences of the individual, the urbanite. However, Yung's standpoint may be questioned because the identity of the characters and their human condition discussed in Cortazar's short stories and in novels such as *Rayuela* (1963) are, notwithstanding, dependent on the culture and symbolism of the two great capitals that are the customary settings of his narratives: Buenos Aires and Paris.

The Neoliberal Metropolis. Over the last few decades (through the 1980s and 1990s), Buenos Aires has become a world megalopolis, a globalized, neoliberal city with a population of over 12 million in Greater Buenos Aires. Neoliberal capitalism has changed the face of the city: new buildings, shopping malls and entertainment centers have emerged, creating a new way of life for its inhabitants. This huge, socially

polarized metropolis, struggles with the problems of overpopulation, pollution, and delinquency, and, irrevocably, is often represented in contemporary Argentinean literature as a place of urban desolation and emptiness.

Richard Lehan, in his extensive, futuristic description of the postmodern city dwells on this characteristic and shares the prediction of numerous human geographers and sociologists who have also analyzed the post-industrial urban condition:

> Overpopulated cities will strain government services, be clotted by unemployed youth, and generate multiethnic tension. And as machines displace more workers in the industrial world, both in Europe and America, the main problem will be finding enough jobs to fuel a consumer society. Moreover, the futuristic city – that is, the future postmodern city – will require greater energy for its reduced industrial production, more central authority at the expense of personal freedom, more abstract and interconnected commercial activity. It will become more difficult to read and to understand, especially at the margins of urban sprawl. (288)

His vision may be compared to that of Buenos Aires of the near future presented in the novel *La muerte como efecto secundario* by Ana María Shua (1997):

> *La muerte*... se desarrolla en una Argentina posible, en donde todo lo que podía ir mal, fue mal: es decir, un anticipo cruel de lo que nos está pasando aquí y ahora. Buenos Aires está dividida en barrios tomados, barrios cerrados y tierra de nadie: el poder del Estado es prácticamente nulo, la policía existe pero no cuenta. La violencia es permanente: robos asaltos, vandalismo. No se puede circular a pie por las calles, casi no hay transporte público, los taxis son blindados y las grandes empresas mantienen pequeños ejércitos de seguridad. Las cámaras de televisión están en todas partes: la vida y la muerte son, ante todo, un espectáculo. Los geriátricos – llamados "Casas de Recuperación" – ahora son obligatorios: un rentable negocio privado en una sociedad en donde no cualquiera llega a viejo. (Shua: back cover)

Certainly, what Shua describes is a "possible" Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, in light of contemporary urban transformations, it could be claimed that the city of poverty, consumerism and fear already exists. Shua's Buenos Aires of the near future takes the

present to an extreme, but it is a perfect illustration of some of the problems the city currently suffers.

In his book *Postales del porvenir*, a critical approach to representations of neoliberal Buenos Aires, Fernando Reati sees literary accounts of Buenos Aires of the 1990s in terms of images of the chaotic and violent city of the future. He observes the prevalence of mutating, panoptic, postapocalyptic and ghettoized conditions in the Argentinean capital in the novels of Enrique Rodolfo Fogwill (*Vivir afuera*, 1999), Sergio Chejfec (*El aire*, 1992), Ana Maria Shua (*La muerte como efecto secundario*, 1997), Marco Denevi (*Manuel de historia,* 1985), César Aira (*Los misterios de Rosario*, 1994), and Ricardo Piglia (*La ciudad ausente,* 1992):

> En la Argentina [...] la imágen novelística de ciudades mutantes, en crisis, posapocalípticas o sometidas a potencias extranjeras respondió más bien a temores más acotados que tienen que ver con el impacto de la globalización neoliberal en un país periférico [...] las novelas de anticipación ofrecen urbes distópicas, posapocalípticas, "guetoizadas", internacionalizadas o invadidas por la naturaleza: visiones todas de un futuro de pesadilla [...]. (92)

La muerte como efecto secundario by Shua is indeed an excellent example of a frightening apocalyptic vision. Many other novels project such an unfamiliar and far from idyllic image of Buenos Aires, whose inhabitants may feel exiled or alienated in their own environment. In fact, one of the first writers to show the inner alienation/exile of the city inhabitant was Roberto Arlt whose estranged characters roamed the city of the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, the fragmented Buenos Aires of the 1990s is incapable of providing the possibility for an individual to feel part of a common, identifiable space: "estas novelas forman parte de un duelo colectivo que

los argentinos comenzaron a transitar entre los 80 y el fin del siglo ante la desaparición de la realidad familar" (Reati: 136-37).

***Porteño* exiles**

Buenos Aires, as shown in the first part of this chapter, is a powerful image in Argentinean literary discourse and culture that have both evolved through a series of historical phases. Buenos Aires has been described in terms of its presence; many literary works look at it as a scene of social life or an urban landscape that shapes subjects' identity. However, when analyzing its representations, one cannot omit the significance of displacement. Almost as often as a present city, Buenos Aires is a city of absence and nostalgia. The discourse of displacement, as a result of immigration, travel and especially exile, has existed in Argentinean culture and literary production for a long time. Buenos Aires is frequently presented nostalgically, as Alicia Borinsky has remarked: it is "a city of departures [that] has the capacity to seduce, to make itself be missed, to instil the sense that that very scepticism about its own roots is a unique source of identity" (152). Borinsky reflects on the condition of the city: "The look of Buenos Aires is distinct but borrowed. It is itself thanks to the power of the derivations that compose it. Buenos Aires exists as a myth in tango, a promise of exile enmeshed in the experience of love" (Borinsky: 145).

There are different types of displacement evoked in Argentinean literature. Not all of them have to do with physical absence since a person can feel displaced, or rather out-of-place, in the city itself. The inhabitants of Buenos Aires are considered very nostalgic, and their longing is often a cultural one, as in the cultural nostalgia for

Paris among *porteños* who have never left their home place and never seen the French capital, but miss its culture, its inspiring bohemian aura.

A desire for a place that is absent can also mean the longing for the city of the past, missing a place that is not there anymore, or feeling out-of-place in the place that was once familiar but now is unrecognizable and estranged. Such is the displacement of Jorge Luis Borges. His Buenos Aires is very much a remembered city of his childhood rather than an account of the Buenos Aires of his present. He returns there in 1921, in the midst of significant and fast changes, to encounter "a city which was ceasing to exist or receding to the outskirts, because Buenos Aires was moving with an unrestrainable impulse" (Sarlo: 111). The poem "Arrabal" from the book *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) shows how the city of Jorge Luis Borges' childhood determines his experiences of other cities while he remains in Europe:

> El arrabal es el reflejo de nuestro tedio.
> Mis pasos claudicaron
> cuando iban a pisar el horizonte
> y quedé entre las casas,
> cuadriculadas en manzanas
> diferentes e iguales
> como si fueran todas ellas
> monótonos recuerdos repetidos
> de una sola manzana.
> El pastito precario,
> desesperadamente esperanzado,
> salpicaba las piedras de la calle
> y divisé en la hondura
> los naipes de colores del poniente
> y sentí *Buenos Aires*.
> Esta ciudad que yo creí mi pasado
> es mi porvenir, mi presente;
> los años que he vivido en Europa son ilusorios,
> yo estaba siempre (y estaré) en Buenos Aires.

The streets of Buenos Aires of Borges' past are inscribed in his "*entrañas*" and, as such, form part of his identity, his human condition. The modern urban landscape of Buenos Aires does not hold the same value for him, because it is not a part of memory. While nostalgically longing for the city of his childhood, he feels alienated and estranged in the city of the present.

Borges' alienation in the place that his native city became is naturally a different emotion than the sense of displacement felt by people who are new to it, who have been uprooted from their birthplace. This kind of displacement must be explored because Argentina is a country of immigrants. It received one of the largest influxes of immigrants of all Latin American countries at the turn of the twentieth century, making the proportion of foreigners in relation to natives in 1914 rise to a very significant 42.7% (Wilson: 18). Most of the European immigrants remained in the city of Buenos Aires and contributed not only to its growth and expansion, but also, most remarkably, to *porteño* culture. Although there are numerous travel testimonials of immigrants who arrived in the city, the feelings of rupture and displacement mixed with hopeful expectations towards their new home are most vividly inscribed in the lyrics of tango. According to Faye Bendrups, the popular cultural phenomenon of tango "can be regarded as having logically evolved from transient populations' responses to an historic, spatially-derived sense of loss, failure and dislocation, which they encountered in rural and urban landscapes of Argentina" (100). Immigrants from Europe came to Argentina in search for new opportunities, challenges and adventures, all of which was promised to them through the myth of Buenos Aires, the city of dreams:

> The immigrants were outsiders. They brought their old customs and habits to meld with the new. They were poor and powerless, but dreaming of wealth and opportunity. In the land of promise, they sought personal gain. Central to the identity of Buenos Aires is the effect of change, in areas such as trade and commerce, cultural and political life, and population shifts. (104)

Tangos, such as one of the most famous, "Mi Buenos Aires querido", celebrate the city that witnesses immigrant loves and sorrows. They document life in *barrios* and on the streets by evoking particular habits and experiences of people living in this particular urban environment (106). At the same time, they offer nostalgic images of the past; the tango "Viejo rincón" depicts a painful yearning for the familiar city:

> Viejo rincón de mis primeros tangos,
> donde ella me batió que me quería;
> guarida de cien noches de fandango
> que en mi memoria viven todavía.
> ¡Oh, callejón de turbios caferatas
> que fueron taitas del mandolión!
> ¿Dónde estará mi garçonniere de lata,
> testigo de mi amor y su traición? (*www.todotango.com*)

Later, tangos also refer to the experiences of Argentines exiled from Buenos Aires, and express their longing for the city of their past. The sadness, and the desire to go back is longingly evoked in "Anclao en París":

> Tirao por la vida de errante bohemio
> estoy, Buenos Aires, anclao en París.
> Cubierto de males, bandeado de apremio,
> te evoco desde este lejano país. [...]
> Lejano Buenos Aires ¡qué lindo que has de estar! [...]
> ¡Cómo habrá cambiado tu calle Corrientes..!
> ¡Suipacha, Esmeralda, tu mismo arrabal..!
> Alguien me ha contado que estás floreciente
> y un juego de calles se da en diagonal...
> ¡No sabes las ganas que tengo de verte!
> Aquí estoy varado, sin plata y sin fe...
> ¡Quién sabe una noche me encane la muerte
> y, chau Buenos Aires, no te vuelva a ver! (*www.todotango.com*)

Tangos have established the identity of a *porteño* who constantly feels overwhelmed by feelings of sadness, loss, melancholy, and nostalgia.

A *porteño* removed from Buenos Aires by necessity, or any person who is exiled, experiences another type of displacement, made all the more difficult, because it is often involuntary and therefore traumatic. The perspective of this particular type of displacement offers valuable insights into the experience of the city. The discourse of exile "thrives on detail, specificity, and locality. [...] There is a *there* there in exile" says Hamid Naficy in the introduction to the book *Home, Exile, and Homeland* (4).

The topic of exile from one's homeland is certainly an important Latin-American phenomenon. Exile is a historical condition of Argentineans that goes back to José San Martín (1778-1850), an Argentinean leader of the struggle for independence exiled in France. There have been many writers since his time who left Argentina for various reasons (personal, political or economical) to live and create in other places, often in Europe. These include Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Osvaldo Soriano, and others, whose narratives construct the figure of the displaced person. While exile is clearly not just a twentieth-century phenomenon in Argentina, the political exile during the so-called "Dirty War" (1976-1983) conducted by the military government is especially important in recent literary history due to the large number of intellectuals and writers who were forced to leave the country (or were self-exiled to escape censorship). Many continued writing abroad, bringing their unique outside perspective to their ongoing analysis of Argentina's difficult reality. The exiled writers often travelled around the world working, writing or teaching,

before they settled in a particular place such as Spain (Reina Roffé, Daniel Moyano), France (Juan José Saer, Luisa Futoransky, Antonio di Bendetto), United States (Silvia Molloy, Luisa Valenzuela, Tomas Eloy Martínez, Ricardo Piglia), or other Latin American countries (Tununa Mercado in Mexico). Their novels tell the story of their exile and explore the condition of displacement and alienation, as in Luisa Valenzuela's *La Travesía* (2001), Luisa Futoransky's *De Pe a Pa* (1986) or *Son cuentos chinos* (1983), and Daniel Moyano's *Libro de navíos y borrascas* (1981). Other novels, such as *La realidad nacional desde la cama* (1991) by Luisa Valenzuela, *El cielo dividido* (1996) by Reina Roffé or *En estado de memoria* (1990) by Tununa Mercado, and *El común olvido* (2002) by Silvia Molloy, are post-dictatorial narratives that describe the return to democratic Argentina. They communicate the difficult process of *desexilio* that involves the experience of return to a "foreign" Buenos Aires, the initial lack of a sense of belonging, and the necessity to recover the places of the past from the unrecognizable reality of present Argentina.

The voices of exiled authors often reveal a sensation of displacement that shapes their peculiar relationship with the homeland, which is based just as much "on actual material access [...] as on the symbolic imaginings and national longings that produce and reproduce them" (Naficy: 6). In other words, on the workings of an individual imaginative geography and individual experience of exile linked to cultural collective meanings. In this respect, before undertaking an analysis of contemporary Argentinean examples of literary exile, one has to understand how movement in space directly contributes to a radical change of perspective on habitual and new surroundings.

The perspective of displacement

There is no doubt that being an outsider changes how home places are viewed; certain relations with them suddenly become clearer when people move away. Hence, the constant need to look back and nostalgically re-construct the home left behind makes it easier to see what particular bond and relation has been formed with it. Places from our past are continuously mapped in our minds through comparison and contrast with those belonging to our present. In the course of everyday life people seldom reflect on the place they inhabit; they just live in it, and fill it with everyday stories that accumulate unconsciously in their minds. However, everybody has a particular imaginative geography constructed of memories, desires, dreams, and longings. It refers to past places as well as to future destinations. Similarly, everyone has images of unknown places, which, in most cases, are culturally accepted ones. This socio-cultural construct, living in a collective memory, interacts with individual stories and desires, and causes people to make certain assumptions about the places they are heading towards, but once the destination is reached, the image of it is usually transformed.

There are many reasons why people abandon their home places, sometimes out of political necessity, sometimes in search of a better life and economic opportunities. Exile is, without doubt, a unique type of displacement, where the departure is involuntary and the return is often impossible, at least temporarily (Grinberg: 3). Exile is "a removal in space as well as in spirit", "a physical uprooting" to a place with unrecognizable coordinates. (Kaminsky: 10).

Once arrived at the destination, an expatriate is almost always bound to the condition of an outsider who is both removed from the old home and culture and also feeling alienated in the new, foreign environment. Common feelings of anxiety, sadness, pain and nostalgia influence hopes and expectations of the displaced persons with regard to the new and unknown place that has to be their home from now on (Grinberg: 8). This unknown world is always different from the familiar, intimate and known territory of the place left. There are many obstacles to overcome in order to integrate into the new society such as a new language, customs, and local behaviors. In addition, the condition of being an outsider necessarily entails a kind of sensory deprivation because dislocated people are forced to see and think without the support of a whole world of known sights, sounds and smells, and tactile experiences. The removal from a familiar environment entails a loss of the world recognizable to one's senses. It is difficult to anchor in a place that contains no sensory memories of a personal past and few links to make it accessible:

> The child knows the world more sensuously than does the adult. This is one reason why the adult cannot go home again. This is also one reason why a native citizen knows his country in a way that cannot be duplicated by a naturalized citizen who has grown up elsewhere. (Tuan: 185)

This dramatic deprivation of senses problematizes the relationship with the new environment, unknown to both personal/sensory and cultural landscape perception. It is necessary to rebuild a sensory geography in relation to the new place, because, as Amy Kaminsky reminds us, those who "stay in the station with their suitcases unpacked" miss the opportunity to really know the new place, and acculturate, and, as a result, always stay apart (50). Becoming familiar with a place takes time, but familiarity can be achieved through active participation in the routine

of everyday life of the new community, so that, when foreignness diminishes, exile "can be a source of intensive pleasure, even of rebirth" (15). Meanwhile, remembering the places left behind is a common activity of displaced people. Remembering is "an act of coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss" (Seyhan: 4).

Memory also plays an important role in the way cities are imagined and "new" and "old" places reconstructed. What does it mean to remember the city, to make its past present? Memory is "intricately interwoven with particular sites" (Bridge and Watson: 9); it shapes the city at the same time as it is shaped by it. Our understanding of the present is "invariably predicated on actual or imagined links to, or ruptures from, a recalled past" (Seyhan: 4). In addition, when remembering, people work through current desires and anxieties. The past is not just brought to mind as a fact, it is narrated, dramatized by a subject who is both actor and spectator. Recalling cities means to imagine the visual qualities of that place and the events that happened there because "once abandoned by words, the [image of the] city would fall into ruins" (Ozich: 31). The city of the past is formed in the mind from strata or recollected events, histories, lives, and loves. It is constructed as a palimpsest, a complex mental map of significance. Such mental maps help people to recognize their home places, but also, remind them that they are removed from there and their past can only be imagined. The familiar image of the city (a mix of reality and imaginary) that one remembers makes it easier to identify with one's past and present it as an individual, cultural and social entity.

Living in exile is often described as "being at home and longing for other places and other times" (Naficy: 3). According to David Morley, people who have moved away from their home, often see it as a longed-for lost paradise, so that their perspective on the homeland becomes unintentionally fixed and backward-looking (49). Consequently, homecoming is "a spatial and temporal journey to a now non-existent era" (51), because exile encourages hanging on to the images of a past that never really was. In fact, anyone revisiting home will feel displaced there; it does not matter that the reasons for their exile might differ, or that ties with the homeland have been maintained through visits, letters, photos, and gifts (51). Not even a person who manages to negotiate life between two countries can easily go back home. Amy Kaminsky explains that "an exile never returns" (19), at least not to the place as it was *before*, as the person they were *before* (19), while David Morley argues that "migrants commonly look to an idealised and fossilized image of their mother country to redeem their own self-respect and are enraged when their home country falls short of their expectation" (49).

To explain the impossibility of "going back" home, in the sense that it will have moved on from where we left it, Doreen Massey dwells on the relation between space and time. "Space comes to seem so very much more *material* than time" (2005: 117), because time is seen as abstract dimension of change "as interior, as a product of (human) experience" (117), while space is "the [material] landscape outside the window, the surface on earth, a given" (117). Why would it be difficult then to go back to places? Massey explains that it is because space and time come together in spatio-temporal events. Since they only operate jointly, neither of them is fixed and

unchangeable. Therefore, any narration about the past, even our own memories, presents a picture of the world at one, particular moment (107). The story of place is ongoing, just as time is. As a consequence, "the 'presentness' of the horizontality of space is a product of a multitude of histories whose resonances are still there [...]" (107).

However, "it is not just buried histories at issue here, but histories still being made, now" (118). For Massey, space is "a surface, but one which slopes in time" (123). People who imagine going home, want to go "back" in space and time, "back to the old familiar things, to the way things used to be" (124), but one can never "simply 'go back' to home or to anywhere else" because "[...] when you get 'there' the place will have moved on just as you yourself will have changed" (124). Massey gives an example of her own nostalgic image of home, an intimate place where things have always been done in a certain way. Going home on one occasion, Massey was especially looking forward to her mother's specialty: a chocolate cake, a wartime recipe that everyone loved and that she would *always* make for her daughters. But that particular time, her mother served a different cake, a new recipe she was very proud of. Massey's only reaction to that was "Oh Mum ... but we like the *old* chocolate cake" (124). By saying that, she admits having deprived her mother and her home place of their ongoing stories because she expected home to be a place of her past, not having changed even a bit:

> You can't go back in space-time. To think that you can is to deprive others of their ongoing independent stories. It may be 'going back home', or imagining regions and countries as backward, as needing to catch up, or just taking that holiday in some 'unspoilt, timeless spot'. The point is the same. You can't go back. (De Certeau's trajectories are not, in fact, reversible. That you can trace backwards on a page/map does not mean

> you can in space-time. The indigenous Mexicans might retrace their footsteps, but their place of origin will no longer be the same.) You can't hold places still. What you *can* do is meet up with the others, catch up with where another story has got to 'now', but where that 'now' (more rigorously, that 'here and now', that ***hic et nunc***) is itself constituted by nothing more than – precisely – that meeting-up (again). (125)

Displacement, whether in the form of travel, exile or voluntary immigration to better life/job/opportunities, is a complex phenomenon. When engaging in the analysis of particular city readings written by and about displaced subjects, one has to understand that these readings very often come from one of the most traumatic experiences that an individual can endure and that radically changes their perspective on real and imaginary places.

Argentinean women writers: a *flâneuse* on the move

The overview of the literary images of Buenos Aires presented in the first part of this chapter shows how the city evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and explains how a symbolic Buenos Aires came to be. However, one of the factors in the history of this urban image has not been highlighted. All the accounts to which I have referred that created that iconic image were written by men and represent a male gaze and a male experience of the city. The historical representation of the Argentinean capital has been created by men and it has been engendered from a predominantly male perspective, whether it is Manuel Gálvez's *Historia de arrabal*, a tale of a young woman oppressed by men and forced to become a prostitute; the explorations by Arlt's *flâneur* of the apocalyptic city; or the tango lyrics that present urban life through images of women as objects of desire.

However, in the last 30 years, female voices have become more prevalent in Argentinean literature and a new image of Buenos Aires has evolved based on their representations of the city. Luiza Lobo refers to new stream of Latin-American women writers who "[break] out of the home both physically and stylistically, venturing into the epic mode and the tangled web of city streets" (163). In her opinion, women experience the postmodern city "not as voyeurs but in pleasurable adventures and as the performers of their own futures" (163); their personal perspective becomes a constituting element of the spatio-temporal event. Women's writings are traditionally centred on the subjective "space within the body, the home, the mind, and the emotions" (163). For example, Helen Scalway describes her own everyday experience as a female subject in the city

> Unable to hold the large scene in a controlling view, not identifying with large dominating perspectives and vistas, my gaze often seems to collapse in space into a touching with the eyes, and with more than the eyes; a visual caress of fragments which interest me. Indeed, I'm convinced that if I could see the vista, the large perspective, then I would not actually be able to perceive anything else. In fact, my exclusion as a subject from the controlling perspective both enjoins on me and enables me to seek into a much more bodily and complex relationship with my surroundings. (169)

The chaotic, fragmentary and sensual experience of the city filtered through a subjective perspective is especially vivid when the female subject is spatially dislocated, removed from the familiar, homely surroundings into a new, unknown territory, as Marzena Grzegorczyk points out in her discussion of female subjectivity in narrative:

> Spatial dislocation [...] is more than just physical displacement for the female subject. Since she experiences the changing world in a fragmented way, she expresses not the fullness of her experience but the opposite: recognition of the lack of unity and continuity in the world and in her own individual response. (60)

According to Grzegorczyk, "the figure of female wanderer [...] participates in a specific epistemological project". Female wanderers deny the male model of stable contemplation; they "are not *constructors* of knowledge. They are, instead, *collectors*" (56), "they are always in the middle and, in the stories they tell '*and*' is their favorite conjunction" (63). Wandering *flâneuses* gather fragments and pieces of the stories from the past and present, "constructing their past in a rhizomatic fashion rather than in a more traditional, linear way [...], their past [...] under perpetual construction" (63). By negotiating urban reality through their imagination, they constantly reinvent the city and themselves.

Grzegorczyk purposefully uses the term wanderer (57) instead of nomad or exile. The wanderer is a figure that encompasses aspects of both notions, despite the fact that they are often perceived as contradictory: nomad is a person on the move, homeless by choice; while an exile's experience is that of place-bound nostalgia, a painful search for a lost home. The wanderer is a "mixture of nomadic independence, perpetual mobility, freedom and a particular relation to space [who,] at the same time [...] exhibits a sense of loss and nostalgia typical of the exilic subjects" (57).

There is a large array of established Argentinean women writers on exile, such as Luisa Valenzuela, Reina Roffé, Luisa Futoransky, Tununa Mercado. In their writings, recognizable images of urban settings such as Buenos Aires, New York or Paris hold the status of "places-in-mind" with their iconic and symbolic traditional cultural contexts that relate to a commonplace geography and constitute a familiar map to those capable of reading it. Nevertheless, the sense of nostalgia and longing for a real or imagined homeland, as well as the hopes and expectations for new

places, combined, at last, with a female perspective, transform those common images. In the novels I have chosen for commentary in the next two chapters, the exiled female subjects have to deal with their inability to "go back", whether in their minds or in reality. As we shall see, their idea of home, while they are abroad, has nothing to do with what is really going on in their country. In fact, their relationship with the home place is based on the cultural and symbolic imagining, interwoven in their own memories.

CHAPTER 4

FLÂNERIE IN NEW YORK: IN SEARCH OF BUENOS AIRES IN *LA TRAVESÍA* BY LUISA VALENZUELA

In *Streetwalking the Metropolis* Deborah Parsons analyzes the image of the urban walker in modern fiction. She looks at female urban narratives to discover how "the atmosphere of the urban space becomes all-pervasive in the texts of the most formally experimental of the women writing within them, the urban consciousness they produce translating into the very style of writing" (228). She argues that the city enables and provides space for women to "explore their identities and their writerly voices" (228). Female *flânerie* yields a montage of impressionistic images of the material city, carefully collected urban symbols, and subjective experience. Female "writing of the city *in* texts results from their walking of the city *as* text" but is not aimed at creating "the order of a graphic map" (229). Helen Scalway comments on the idea of the map as always representing an "edited view from above, powerful, controlling" that exists simply for the purpose of "telling lies". She remarks that private maps are much more intriguing "because of the glimpse they offer into other people's private navigation systems" (171), although even they cannot easily express the complexity and nuances of urban experience. She believes that instead of a cartographic, controlling view of the city, it is important to pay more attention to the "processes of *journeying* by which maps come into being in the first place". The experience of a *flâneuse*, with her constant elusive urban movement is precisely the

kind of "tour" that, as Parsons adds, "walks away from the categorizing, possessing gaze of the masculine observer" (229) or cartographer and provides a less superficial account of the urban experience.

Luisa Valenzuela's *La travesía* presents such a journey, a *travesía* through the city that, instead of drawing an easily legible map of New York and Buenos Aires, sheds light on the particular kind of experience a female character has in these cities. Marcela Osorio, the main character of Valenzuela's novel, is a *flâneuse* in a strange city ultimately searching for the one she left behind. She has to deal with her Argentinean experiences of social and personal abuse. Her female body, formerly subjected to the masculinity of the society in Argentina, is liberated through *flânerie* in New York.

This chapter will explore how the practice of *flânerie* in Valenzuela's novel becomes a means of female empowerment and recovery of a lost place and identity. I will analyze Marcela's "anthropologizing" of the metropolis, a version of Walter Benjamin's famous phrase "botanizing on the asphalt", that suggests the practice of careful observation of the patterns and rhythms of city life, evoking a botanist's survey of plants in the countryside. A much less controlling, but more openly subjective *flânerie* in New York, leads Marcela to return to an absent city of memory and eventually liberates her from the objectified image of the self that is symbolized in the novel through recurring memories of Buenos Aires. As a result, different versions of Buenos Aires, a city of tangos, of her youthful wanderings, her difficult relationship with her husband Facundo, and, finally, of the terrors of dictatorship eventually coalesce and become one, the palimpsestic city of Marcela's past.

The present of the novel is located in the late 1990s in New York and its surroundings (*tiempos neoyorquinos*) while the main character's frequent reminiscences transport us back to Buenos Aires of the 1970s (*tiempos facundinos*, named after Facundo, her secret ex-husband). Marcela Osorio, whose name we do not actually learn until the penultimate page of the book, is a forty-something anthropologist, originally from Buenos Aires, who works at Columbia University in New York. She has been exiled from Argentina for over twenty years and has yet to return there. Her New York schedule is packed; in addition to teaching classes at the University, she attends parties and art events; she meets with her bohemian friends and lovers, and visits Creedmore, a suburban asylum for the mentally ill, where her artist friend Bolek directs an artistic project involving the patients.

New York is not the first place she has visited since leaving Argentina. In fact, she is a very experienced traveller who has literally been around the world. The notion of movement is emphasized throughout the entire novel as the driving force of the protagonist's life: "salir a buscar la luz huyendo de las sombras. [...] Es la historia de su vida, la de los eternos viajes. [...] Soy movediza. [...] en el sentido de estar siempre a un costado de mí, de buscarme a lo lejos" (174). Marcela left Buenos Aires in 1977, in the midst of terror and oppression. She did not choose to travel, but was sent out of Argentina by her husband Facundo Zuberbühler, a law professor, 30 years older than her, whom she met when she was a student, and with whom she had a clandestine relationship that ended in a secret marriage. During the military regime in Argentina, Facundo, seeking to "protect" her from the atrocities of the dictatorship, promised to provide her with airplane tickets and traveller's cheques, as long as she

would stay away from Argentina and its dangers and write him erotic letters from her travels. She agreed and left Buenos Aires at the age of twenty-one for the first trip to Sydney, Bali, and Java, in order to "cumplir a lo bruto el sueño de viajar por el mundo" (120). Ever since, she has managed to "viajar, realizando el sueño de su vida de no estar nunca en parte alguna" (130). She accepts her nomadic life as a condition of her displacement that allows her to reinvent herself constantly and change skins:

> De piel, reconoce, cambió un montón de veces. Tantas como cambió de residencia. Ciudades desfilando por su vida como si ella fuera un punto estático alrededor del cual el mundo gira enloquecido. En realidad esa nunca fue la sensación. Enloquecidos ambos, el mundo y ella, girando en sentido opuesto, rozándose apenas. Tampoco esto es acertado. Más bien se trata de un entrevero de los seres que fue y es ella ahora, seres alocados, ardientes, aterrados, temerarios, ecuánimes, atrabiliarios. (118)

Her physical *travesía* through unfamiliar cities around the world ends twenty years later in New York, where she decides to anchor herself to a satisfying job and a group of dear friends at her side. While in New York, Marcela manages to push Buenos Aires into oblivion until one of her friends, a Polish artist named Bolek Greczynski, tells her he has in his possession the letters she had been writing to Facundo during many years of traveling. Bolek found the letters in Marcela's old *porteño* apartment during his brief stay in Buenos Aires in 1982 and decided to keep them, believing in their literary value. He also thought that they were written by a *desaparecida*, but later found out that the author was living in New York, where he was also permanently residing. In due course he located Marcela and, after they became friends, he revealed the truth about his discovery.

The letters, still in Bolek's hands, bring back the absent Buenos Aires to her in an almost physical way. They represent "angustia, la enorme desolación de soledad"

(147). In spite of her best efforts Marcela cannot escape her past. In New York, she embarks on a journey through memory that leads to self-discovery and recovery of both Buenos Aires and her identity. In the end, she manages to come to terms with her past and finally feels ready to take a decision to go back home to Buenos Aires. While recognizing the image of Buenos Aires in *La travesía*, it is also important to locate it in the context of earlier literary representations of the city discussed in the previous chapter. By showing the city from a female point of view, Valenzuela adopts a gendered perspective to express the experiences of her character in Buenos Aires related to her sense of place and search for identity. In this respect, Valenzuela is writing against the traditional, male-oriented image of the Argentinean capital where women were usually objects of a male gaze and a masculine subjectivity, and, by doing so, she addresses the complexity of a culturally defined image of the city as her female subject reinvents it.

Consistent with such a reversal of conventional approaches, the narrative voice of the novel is uncommon for an autobiography, as is first suggested in an introductory note from the author that brings in an element of ambiguity subsequently textualized in the novel itself. In brief, the note states that the novel is an "apocryphal autobiography": "En la presente novela, *apócrifa autobiografía, toda semejanza con la realidad es absolutamente voluntaria*. Junto a una protagonista inventada se mueven personas conocidas que han sabido hacer de su vida un arte, o viceversa" (12; my emphasis). Unlike conventional autobiographies where a story is told in the first person, this is a "close up portrait in third person, but from her [Marcela's] perspective" (Lindstrom), a kind of biographical autobiography. In *La travesía* the

narrator tells a version of the life story of Valenzuela, but does so indirectly, not in her own voice, thereby distancing the author from her story and deconstructing the conventional idea of autobiography.

One of the techniques used by Valenzuela to textualize the fragmented, disembodied self is to confuse different levels of literary speech. For example, a number of dialogues are represented without standard punctuation so that the speech of the characters is assimilated by the voice of the narrator, as in the following fragment:

> Lo conoció unos tres años atrás, en cierta reunión [...] a la que le había llevado [...] Ava [...]. Quiero darte una sorpresa, le dijo. Y la sorpresa resultó ser un tal Bolek [...]. El hombre en su tono displicente le estaba citando un trabajo publicado en Anthropology Today. Hace mucho que te leo, muchísimo más de lo que te podés imaginar, le dijo con aire misterioso y sobrador; imaginate, te busqué en Buenos Aires en el '82 [...] Hablás de historia antigua, entonces no vivía acá ni había publicado nada [...] estás queriendo impresionarme. No me interesa impresionar a nadie, le contestó [...]. (34-35)

Here the narrative describes the first time Marcela met Bolek and illustrates clearly how character dialogue is incorporated into narrator disourse. Unmarked by punctuation, the narration is somewhat confusing, as if the author were showing how everything comes from a single memory.

In her unconventional use of narrative voice Valenzuela has seemingly textualized the feelings of alienation and confusion common to displaced people who live their lives through the memory of their past. The statement in the introductory note that the story is an autobiography to be taken as both real and fictional by the reader is also part of that confusion. In the end, however, the note anticipates that the

point of view privileged in the novel is subjective and corporeal: "La autora, a sabiendas de que se escribe con el cuerpo, puso en buena medida el suyo (porque la imaginación también es el cuerpo) para pergeñar esta historia en la cual ciertos movimientos del alma le son propios, no así las circunstancias" (12). From the beginning, it is clear that the story, and therefore the city will be sketched or subjectively outlined, as the word *pergeñar* suggests, as opposed to being methodically and objectively mapped.

Luisa Valenzuela, an Argentinean born in Buenos Aires, spent many years of her life in metropolises such as Paris, Barcelona, Mexico City, and New York. The two cities that hold a special place for the author and are often evoked in her novels are the Buenos Aires of her youth and the New York where she spent five years as a visiting professor at New York University. In some of her later books, such as *Novela negra con argentinos* (1991) and *La travesía* (2001) her characters are exiled in New York, where they live their reinvented lives against the background of a past in Buenos Aires that is always on their minds. *La travesía* especially, provides many insights into the individual perception of place and of the role of personal memories, desires and dreams in the literary reconstruction of both the present and the absent city, namely New York and Buenos Aires respectively.

Presence: *flânerie* in New York

> Nueva York, ciudad paradigmática donde todo lo *in* está a la venta y se trata de lo inconfesable, lo inefable, inenarrable, intocable, lo infecto, inmundo, íntimo e infinito. (Valenzuela, 2002: 186-87)

Urban New York City is the main present-time setting of the first 300 pages of the novel, although in the last part of the book, events move into the hills and forests of upstate New York, where the protagonist finally makes peace with her own inner self. Regardless of this ending, Marcela's urban experiences are crucial to her self-discovery. The narrative presents events, memories, and reflections of New York, interrupted by reminiscences about Buenos Aires. Valenzuela draws on iconographic representations and cultural imaginings of New York as a place of art and excitement, where a single person can live an entertaining life and meet all manner of interesting people. She admits that when she sat down to write *La travesía,* she wanted to set the story only in Buenos Aires, the city to which the protagonist had just returned after a long absence only to find some old letters she had written to her husband which led her to reminisce further and confront her past. However, in the process of writing, she decided to change the main setting of her novel to New York, a real and important place in her life. As she admits in an interview with María Moreno, from which these observations are taken, this choice made it much easier to write her personal story. Valenzuela explains that New York's "mundo de artistas plásticos, con sus ideas, y el peso de una enorme institución psiquátrica se me hicieron imprescindibles para relatar el trayecto de la protagonista", and adds:

> Nueva York me interesa sobre todo como metáfora. [...] Ya no es la ciudad concreta. Se mencionan lugares específicos, pero sin la intención de que connoten topográficamente la ciudad verdadera, como ocurre en *Novela negra con argentinos*. En *La travesía*, la ciudad se diluye un poco, pero me sirve como esencia de la actualidad, de este mundo donde las cosas se transforman tan vertiginosamente, y como metáfora del ser humano, de su interioridad. (Moreno, website)

New York is a metaphor of everyday life, a present existence, the "here and now". As Shurmer-Smith reminds us in her book *Doing Cultural Geography*, places are not represented in literature to provide a map or a mimetic reflection of reality, but to communicate a set of meanings and they enter into dialogue with the text for this purpose (130). In this respect, New York in *La travesía* allows both Valenzuela and the narrator of her story, to look at the city of their past from a safe distance, and there could be no better scenario than that for an eye-opening exploration of the self. As we join the main character on her intense walks around the city, New York becomes a point of departure, a place where the liberty of *flânerie* empowers her as a subject and prepares her to face the Buenos Aires of her past.

Marcela Solá compares the rhythm of Valenzuela's narrative to the rhythm of New York life itself:

> La escritura adquiere el velocísimo ritmo mental propio de Nueva York, ciudad donde al decir de la propia protagonista, no se duerme para no perderse lo fascinante que ocurre a cada minuto, ciudad que le gusta porque no permite cerrar los ojos. Tampoco la novela permite cerrarlos ni desviar la atención porque algo importante puede estarse gestando, y hay que ser capaz de discernirlo en todo momento. En Nueva York, ciudad volcada hacia el futuro, es difícil viajar hacia el pasado y esa continua tensión está presente asimismo en el lenguaje, en su capacidad de operar simultáneamente en direcciones opuestas – como cánones invertidos – lo que al mismo tiempo produce una sensación de infinita libertad, que es otra característica singular de esta novela. (website)

Although we could trace Marcela's steps through New York and draw a map of her route, there would be little point to this kind of bird's eye view from above. The New York of the novel is not a New York where concrete locations matter; it is, above all, a place of self-exploration and self-discovery, and what matters is the *travesía*,

whether this is understood metaphorically or literally through Marcela's practice of walking, de Certeau's exploration of the city "from below".

Marcela Osorio is an avid walker who discovers New York mainly on foot. There are occasional subway or car trips, but her everyday and "everynight" exploration is undertaken, by choice, by walking. The car trip to the outskirts reveals a labyrinth of highways impossible to penetrate; walking clearly promises less confusion. She walks all over Manhattan, through places such as Greenwich Village, Broadway, Soho, and the East Village where she lives. She uses the verb "callejear" to describe her activity of wandering without a destination in mind, something she has been doing since her childhood in Buenos Aires where "creció solita en largos vagabundeos alrededor de la manzana", and she admits that she always had a "vocación de exploradora" (39). In this she resembles the life of Luisa Valenzuela who describes similar childhood experiences in an interview with Ksenjia Biblija:

> Vagaba por todos lados. Me inventaba viajes dentro de la ciudad, iba a París, Barcelona, a Londres sin salir de Buenos Aires. Encontraba alternativas gracias a los cuentos de viajes de mi abuela y a las postales que coleccionaba entonces. [...] Nómada me sentí siempre. Acudimos a las instantáneas, guardamos imágenes, quitamos capas de la superficie urbana y seguimos viviendo caminando. (website)

In the same way, recalling Yi-Fu Tuan's idea of the experiential exploration of the city discussed in our first chapter, Marcela Osorio, the protagonist of *La travesía*, explores the city, acquiring an intimate familiarity with it and personalizing its space. During the daytime in New York, she wanders the city streets, shops and bazaars, occasionally stopping in cafés for a cappuccino with a friend, in sushi bars, restaurants, or museums. At nights, she attends plays, parties, dances and art exhibitions; her friends are mostly artists, painters, or sculptors, so that she spends a

significant amount of time admiring New York's "crazy" art scene. But she enjoys just walking at any time, whenever she feels like it:

> Decide salir a caminar sin rumbo. Camina y camina. Sola. Porque sí, porque se anima. Así se le va escurriendo la noche. Vos lo entendés todo con las patas, le decían de joven, y ella con las patas parecería ahora querer dibujar el mapa de un territorio desconocido: su propia memoria [...] vagando por las calles nada tranquilizadoras. (39)

The pace of New York life corresponds to the chaos of her own life; colourful city scenes always provoke and stimulate her imagination. She refers to the city as "perverse" and "miraculous" and she immerses herself in it and loses herself totally, discovering on her way new places, exotic shops, and ethnic restaurants:

> Sale entonces a hundirse por el laberinto de las calles, debe ir a la biblioteca pero antes quiere perderse un poco, vagar por cualquier parte, marchar hacia el este cuando en realidad debería enfilar sus pasos hacia el oeste, pretende descubrir rincones nuevos, nuevas e inesperadas tiendas ofreciendo mercadería que ella, sudaca al fin, jamás imaginó. (240).

At times, New York feels too tiring and overwhelming; a reminder of common images of a metropolis as an exhausting environment, impossible to control or encompass. Usually this is exactly what she looks for, a distraction from her own thoughts or stimulation, although the constant movement and chaos of the city turns out to be too much at times: "Yo necesito llorar tranquila, necesito poner mis ideas en orden y no andar metiéndome a cada rato en nuevas circunstancias" (160). Her safe place in the city, even if she feels at home on the street most of the time, is her apartment on the third floor of a building in the East Village, opposite a cemetery, among huge trees. It is an intimate place with a spacious, warm kitchen, comfortable furniture, and her own marihuana plant. She often seeks refuge in bed from her haunting thoughts and inexplicable feelings: "se refugia en la cama. Todo pronto

estará en su lugar" (202), or in the bathtub: "se mete en la bañera, ese tibio antro materno refugio de seguridad, y se pone a cavilar sobre el pánico que siente. [...] En el agua tibia de la bañera ella puede permitirse flujos y reflujos del pensamiento sin sentirse amenazada" (146). However, the moments when she feels safe in the confinement of her apartment are rare and she usually chooses to leave what she calls her "nadaquehacer hogareño" (322) and wander around the city:

> Avanza perdida. No quiere volver a casa, en su apartamento hay otro apartamento superpuesto hecho de aire, de pura imaginación calenturienta, y en dicho lugar hay huellas de un imposibe paso dejadas por incierto inexistente gato. Un juego. (313)

An important characteristic of her wandering is randomness; she often lets the street lead her, loving the idea of serendipity and luck. Her passion for aimless drifting through the city in search of stimuli can be compared to buying clothes in second-hand stores where she finds not what she needs but what calls her attention (198). In the same way she wanders around the city in search of surprise:

> Enfila hacia la calle Siete y Primera Avenida. Territorio poco reconocido en su cartografía. Se deja vagar, entonces, y se va apartando de sí para recuperar el entusiasmo que les despiertan estas calles de Manhattan tan hechas de sorpresa. (312)

Sometimes she ends up in unknown territory, strange and dangerous neighbourhoods where she needs to be alert/alive at all times. One day, after pursuing a man she mistakenly took for her ex-boyfriend, she finds herself in an unknown part of the city, and its exploration becomes a game for her: "Perdida en el corazón de la City. Decide entonces explorar la zona. Camina un par de cuadras y se topa con una librería de un viejo, un cambalache de libros apilados" (200). Her willingness to explore the unknown is explained:

> No por autodestructiva lo hace. No. Lo hace por curiosa. Necesita ver qué oculta aquel abismo oscuro [...]. Por el Puerto de Buenos Aires avanzó en las noches facundinas, años más tarde lo hizo por el barrio chino en Barcelona, el cais do porto en Bahia, el Bowery acá en Nueva York. Dondequiera que pueda esconderse alguna infamia. (182)

The way Marcela explores New York is very proper to her profession, and it is not by coincidence that she is an anthropologist. In a way "her practice of *flânerie* activates her role as an anthropologist" (Richards: 154). In her never-ending practice of "botanizing" the streets, she looks and describes "the wildlife" of New York, gathering pieces of urban life much like a botanist who observes the details of nature. She admits that she is consciously collecting "gente o mejor dicho [...] historias de gente" (224). In a way, her practice of *flânerie* is an anthropological study of New York, a game of exploration, both of outer reality and her inner self.

Anthropologists study human behaviour by examining their way of life, language, or physical characteristics; some study the customs, values, and the social patterns of cultures. Marcela's roaming through the streets of New York and participation in its bustling social and artistic life is indeed presented as a careful "anthropologizing" observation. She doubts she could ever explore the richness of the city's life fully: "¿Abandonar la Big Apple? Sí, cuando la haya explorado de fondo. Es decir nunca, porque ésta es la ciudad de la transformación constante, y cuando ya cree haberse compenetrado una zona, la zona se convierte en otra" (225). In addition to her interest in New Yorkers, she is fascinated by the traces of other cultures she finds in the city, fulfilling her anthropological passion to explore alien lives, cultures, and behaviours. On McDougall Street she finds little shops with Tibetan, Pakistani,

Mexican, Moroccan, Indian, and Navajo articles (308) and, as always, is amazed by the richness of culture in New York City.

However, Marcela is never a detached observer, an emotionally disconnected *flâneuse*. She often participates in the life of the city, and becomes involved in other people's stories more than in her own. She admits at the beginning of the novel: "como antropóloga estaba adiestrada para estudiar conductas ajenas, no la propia" (15), suggesting that she acknowledges the necessity to confront *herself* at some point. In the meantime, she not only enjoys observing her friends' habits and behaviour, but often participates in their lives. In the first episode of the novel she helps to set the scenario of an enigmatic blind date for her dominatrix friend, Ava Taurel. Her desire for an anthropological study of the city emerges very specifically in a scene where she throws an African costume party: "support wild life, throw a party, decía una tarjeta que alguien le mandó una vez. Ella hizo propia la idea y les dijo a todos Traigan algo de comer, yo pongo las bebidas" (227). As she looks at her friends, dressed up as wild animals or members of African tribes who "bailan y beben como buenos neoyorquinos [y] no prestan atención a las cosas raras a su alrdedeor" (232), it becomes clear that she is in fact an emotionally involved observer who is "anthropologizing" the urban jungle. While enjoying the observation, she realizes that being an "involved outsider" she feels lonely and truly exiled because New York, no matter how exciting, is not where she belongs. Throughout the novel, Marcela is therefore also "anthropologizing" herself in order to understand the reasons for her loneliness and melancholy. She realizes that all her wandering "inexorablemente la alejaba y alejaba del único punto que a ella podía importarle" (147): Buenos Aires.

At times, a reader of *La travesía* can feel lost in the incoherent, fragmentary narration of Marcela's explorations of New York, and wonders about the reason and meaning of her constant *flânerie*. Marcela does not explain the purpose of her walks very clearly: "quiero encontrar lo que quiero sin saber que lo quiero medio segundo antes de encontrarlo" (201). While her *flânerie* is never a controlling and visual possession of the city, it is always interested, passionate, and engaged. Her observation is never totalizing; she does not come up with a detailed, objective map, nor make essentialist assumptions about the city. Conversely, she walks, observes, and gets involved in New York life in search for knowledge of *herself*, trying to find out where *she* belongs. In other words, what she wants to understand is her own cartography, her own personal map where both cities, Buenos Aires and New York are intrinsically connected to her identity.

This type of female *flânerie* agrees with the ideas of Helen Scalway and Marzena Grzegorczyk who remind us that the *flâneuse* experiences the city in a fragmentary and chaotic way, just as Marcela does, so that her intentionally subjective *flânerie* is an act of negotiation of urban reality through her own experience. She does not try to see New York from a wide perspective; in fact there is no need for such a view because New York is a recognizable image in itself. A moving observer and participant in urban life, Marcela wanders trying to re-discover *herself*, and in her case, that means coming to terms with silenced and forgotten memories of the absent city of Buenos Aires. Her *flânerie* gives her the power to confront these memories.

The absent city: Buenos Aires of her memory

> Dislocadas, existimos atravesando topografías y ajustando las memorias, recuerdos y mitos de los lugares que nos marcaron. "La mal llamada dislocación nos da continuidad, si no identidad". (Biblija, website)

The purpose of Marcela's "anthropologizing" and *flânerie* in New York is much clearer when we consider Buenos Aires as the absent city in the novel. It is absent from *La travesía* in two different ways: it is physically not there and surfaces only in the memories of two characters, Marcela and Bolek, and it is removed in time, a place to which Marcela has not returned in more than twenty years, with a "here and now" with which she has no relationship. It is only the discovery of Marcela's letters that brings Buenos Aires to present and intertwine itself with her life in New York.

Throughout the novel, it is clear that Marcela has ambiguous feelings towards Buenos Aires. On the one hand, it is undoubtedly a city where she felt personally oppressed and abused. On the other, while she is at times lonely and confused in New York, she feels a need to rediscover that lost *porteño* part of herself. But a return to Buenos Aires, whether in her imagination or in reality, is neither simple nor possible, because, as Doreen Massey reminds us: "you can't go back in space and time [...] what you can do is meet up with the other [stories]" (125). Marcela's *travesía* in the novel, which leads to the recovery of place and self constitutes this kind of meeting, stemming from the need to find out where she belongs: New York or Buenos Aires.

Already on the first pages of the novel the reader can see that Argentina and Buenos Aires in particular are not just the background of the protagonist's youth. The complexity of her relationship with Argentina is revealed the very first time her country of origin is mentioned when she refers to "los torturadores de [su] Argentina

lejana" (18). Marcela is a conscious *porteño*, whose old habits, instilled in her when she was a child in Buenos Aires, are present on a daily basis in New York. When she finds herself in an embarrassing situation, she hums a tango, as when her friend stains his white pants badly: "para aflojar tensiones se puso a tararear el tango Tinta Roja, que canta la añoranza del rojo buzón de la esquina, infame nostalgia porteña teñida de mufa" (37). In effect, the lyrics of the tango take Marcela back to Buenos Aires through the expression of a nostalgic longing for the *arrabal*: "¿Quién se robó mi niñez? / Veredas que yo pisé, / malevos que ya no son, / bajo tu cielo de raso / trasnocha un pedazo / de mi corazón" (*www.todotango.com*). Other lines of the same song also serve to remind her that Buenos Aires is a city of immigrants and foreigners who feel displaced, just as she is in New York.

Buenos Aires is visible in the novel not only through the main character's old habits. It is evoked constantly during her walks in New York. Many situations, images, and people in New York bring to her mind the city of her childhood and youth, memories of happiness and desperate romance. Throughout the novel, there are many examples of sudden encounters with a physically absent Buenos Aires. New York bars remind her of *bodegones porteños* (81), and the experience of sudden rain on the streets of Manhattan makes her remember "buenos viejos tiempos de caminatas felices bajo la lluvia porteña" when she used to walk barefoot through the puddles in the middle of the street, which she remembers as "una delicia caminar descalza porque las veredas están calentitas" (79). That happy memory makes her take off her shoes in Soho and enjoy the rain in the same way that she used to in

Buenos Aires. The occasion is one among many memories of other happy times before the dictatorship when she used to wander around the city and map it for herself

> adaptándola a sus propios requerimientos. Eran otros tiempos, otras libertades, bastante acotadas. Igual ella jugaba el juego de entrar rincones mágicos y transformar el patético café en el barrio de Flores, por ejemplo, en un punto de Montmarte y hacer de la torre de los ingleses en retiro Londres, y viajar en colectivo como una correría a una tierra incognita. Tiempos de imaginación. (225)

More sinister memories also resurface gradually in the narrative. One of the first of these refers to traumatic experiences during the dictatorship. Marcela is walking at night in New York when an old Cadillac from the 1950s stops abruptly on the street close to her. When a few frightening looking men get out, she feels a sudden threat that reminds her of Buenos Aires in times of oppression and, above all, of her secret husband: "No tuvo miedo alguno, no, de brusca aparición de muchachones. Sólo el flash Facundo disparó una muy fugaz señal del alarma" (42). The men on the street turn out to be harmless but she realizes "no es reviviendo este tipo de incidentes como va a lograr meterse de lleno en el teatro de la propia memoria" (43).

Bad memories escalate with the reappearance in her life of the letters she wrote to Facundo during her travels around the world. When Bolek Greczynski, who found them, mentions the letters for the first time, she reacts abruptly: "No quiero ni oír ni hablar de esa ciudad" (73) because she prefers, as the sayings go, "no despertar el perro que duerme" (166) or "hacer de tripas corazón" (154). Yet, she feels shaken, in spite of her refusal to acknowledge the letters: "sintió el sobresalto tan pero tan profundo que ni logró registrarlo en el momento su sismógrafo interno parecía estar descompuesto la mayor parte del tiempo en aquel entonces" (36). That moment is the

point of departure. Her inner journey begins as she struggles in vain to keep out recurring memories of the city of her past:

> Era una tarde transparente de sol, estaban en Washington Square con árboles florecidos y todo. [...] Todo en su lugar, sentía ella, feliz, nada parecía poder lastimarla, y lo dejó hablar a su amigo sin percibir la maraña en la que se iba enredando, atenta como estaba al inocente juego de las ardillas en el parque. [...] En Washington Square en esa precisa tarde, ella parecía querer distraerse a toda costa, ausentarse de las palabras de Bolek. [...] Vano intento. Vano sobre todo cuando él mencionó las cartas. [...] A ella se le nubló el día, allí en esa otra plaza tan distinta y distante, sentada en un banco antes benéfico ahora transformado en algo así como un cadalso, obligada por una fuerza incomprensible a escucharlo a Bolek. (73-74)

As Buenos Aires creeps back into her New York life, she tries to ignore and forget it at first, as she always has: "relegó al olvido situaciones que muy tenues afloran a su memoria sin adquirir jamás consistencia de recuerdo" (29). She admits that during all her travels, she has never missed Buenos Aires, because she has learned how to ignore any longing for any place, and appreciate the beauty of the movement and the moment:

> Pieles suyas como lonjas, han quedado abandonadas en Ubud, en Mount Hagen, en París, Barcelona, Alice Springs, Melbourne. Parte de los viajes podríamos calificar como trabajos de campo, desde el punto de vista de la antropología. Otra parte resulta incalificable. Sobre todo en las ciudades de soledad y desdicha donde no la acompañó el deslumbramiento. Tampoco la acompañó el amor, la más de las veces, o la acompañó y no supo darse cuenta. Cierto es que despechada empezó el periplo y el periplo continúa. Todo viaje del héroe culmina con el retorno a casa, pero esta pobre heroína ni quiere oír hablar de volver a BAires y siente que ni siquiera tiene casa. (118-19)

Marcela tries to remain grounded in the present time of her New York life and circle of friends in order to avoid dealing with the past at all, but she finds her emotions resurfacing unavoidably more and more, and memories consuming her painfully. At a certain point, she recognizes that she has to stop and remember her past, find the

absent city: "no puede seguir así. Lo sabe, su vida transcurre hoy aquí en Manhattan, no veinte años atrás en Buenos Aires" (110). After Bolek confesses that he kept all her letters, Marcela's experience can only be described as another *travesía*, a passage through her memory. New York, the city of adventure, becomes a catalyst for her emotional journey and a subjective setting where she constantly reinvents Buenos Aires.

The letters from the past cause the New York scene to blur significantly giving way to images of Buenos Aires and her earlier life there. Marcela wishes she was experiencing the "Teatro de la Memoria del Mundo de Giulio Camillo", a Renaissance idea of "una complicada serie de cajas que en un abrir y cerrar de tapas ofrecía recolección total y una posibilidad mágica de entenderlo todo por asociación para luego poder transmitirlo en palabras brillantes con el brillo de la verdad, palabras que producían efectos mágicos" (30). She asks herself:

> ¿Y ahora qué? Ahora distraerse buscándolo a Giulio Camillo, ese renacentista iluminado y errático, por las calles de Nueva York, como si fuera la Venecia del cinquecento. Total, Nueva York, puede ser cualquier ciudad en cualquier tiempo y permite atravesar barreras como ninguna otra ciudad del mundo. [...] Necesitaría meterse sola en el juego, si encuentra el coraje necesario. (31)

Overwhelmed by the images of her past, she tries to understand and make sense of incoherent memories. She wants, as in "The Theatre of Memory", to analyze them one by one so that in the end she could make sense of her troubled Buenos Aires experience.

As the fragmentary reminiscences that resurface begin to form a more coherent image of Marcela's Buenos Aires the reader is able to understand the reasons for her deliberate suppression of the memories of her *tiempos facundinos*. Her

friend Joe compares state violence in Argentina to the violence on the streets of New York, which he considers more "natural" and "human". Bolek also experiences the incomprehensible violence of Buenos Aires where: "a cada paso por las calles [...] la policía lo arrinconaba por el simple hecho de usar barba. Rápidamente aprendió que por las calles de la dictadura hay que andar a cara descubierta" (132). After spending a few weeks there, meeting with the families of the disappeared and hearing about torture, he understands that Buenos Aires of the dictatorship is a delirious city of fear and repression (133). These are similar to Marcela's memories of "tiempos tumultosos" (48) and terror: "el mundo externo cada día más invivible: 1975, año de razzias, violencia policial, parapolicial, paramilitary, de paranoia pura" (55).

In addition to the obvious traumatic memories of dictatorship, Marcela's recollection of Buenos Aires also involves a more personal drama symbolized by the persona of Facundo Zuberbühler, her secret husband. She admits that her "abismos también tienen nombre. Nombres. Facundo, Buenos Aires" (117), thereby suggesting that her idea of Buenos Aires is synonymous with a personal obsession and oppression related to the figure of her husband.

The Argentinean capital imposes on her the particular type of experiences that are common to her gender. It becomes apparent that she has been abused and objectified in the city both by a socially accepted machismo and by her dangerous, imposing, and powerful "hombre todopoderoso", Facundo. Buenos Aires in the novel is a gendered place, traditionally seen through a male gaze and subject to masculine desires. The reality of machismo surfaces in one of Marcela's memories of her *porteña* friend Greta who could not walk on the streets without being an object of

male desire. She refers to men as "babeantes protozoarios mal llamados hombres que solían seguirla a una por las calles de BAires mascullando obscenidades [...]. Te voy a lamber, susurraban los tipos" (213).

In Buenos Aires, Marcela felt exploited by men to the point that she could not recognize the woman she had become anymore. In her relationship with Facundo, she is similarly objectified. He controls her life: "no quiero que andés por las calles cuando yo me voy, solo podés ir a la calle mientras yo estoy acá controlando tu regreso, la calle está muy violenta en estos tiempos. Eso repetía F, y era una orden" (88). He also tries to talk her into withdrawing from the university and when she threatens to leave him, he proposes marriage or, rather, decides that they will get married secretly: "¿propuso? Más bien dispuso", she recalls (108). While Facundo manipulates Marcela, he keeps his distance all the time, even corporeally, taking for granted that she is in love with him and will do everything he asks.

It is, of course, important to recall that Facundo is a name that echoes the idea of barbarism represented in Domingo Sarmiento's book *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845) through an archetypical Argentine caudillo Juan Facundo Quiroga. He was an authoritative military leader, a symbol of physical power, brutality, chaos, and regression, as well as a certain astuteness. He is presented in Sarmiento's book as the opposite of the educated, high cultured and civil citizen represented by the metropolitan society of Buenos Aires. When Facundo in Valenzuela's novel becomes, in the protagonist's mind, equivalent to the city of dictatorship, the idea of Buenos Aires as a sanctuary of culture, modernity, and civilization also disappears and Marcela becomes a prisoner of a patriarchal Buenos Aires/Facundo.

Although Facundo sends her abroad, he makes her write erotic letters in return, thereby maintaining control and keeping her an object of desire. The only way she knows how to deal with him is to obey, but she "closes" her heart and decides never to reveal her story to anyone. Although Buenos Aires, a symbol of her exploited femininity, grows distant and the only connection with it are the erotic letters, her relationship with the place of oppression and Facundo, remains unchanged. However, there comes a time when she tries to liberate herself and change her situation. First, instead of telling real stories, she chooses to lie in the letters by inventing her adventures and becoming a manipulator herself:

> [...] la deleitosa certidumbre de estarlo engañando. Él me alejó de sí [...] y me mandó al mundo a tener aventuras sexuales para después contárselas. Yo salí del mundo y le conté aventuras que no tuve, aunque el mundo fue generoso conmigo y me brindó suficiente material de inspiración. (125)

Even in New York, after twenty years, Marcela cannot understand why she kept writing for so long, why she was connected to her past by that "cordón umbilical de las cartas" (122). In fact, only when she becomes independent economically, after four years of one-way correspondence with Facundo/Buenos Aires, can she afford to stop what she calls her "vicio", her addiction or "la prostitución epistolar" (131). The memory of this moment is intertwined with the city of Barcelona where Marcela used to live and work as a bartender in the labyrinthine Barrio Gótico. Her sense of this particular place is closely related to her feelings and to how she habitually used it. The dark, narrow streets of the Barrio Gótico where she often enjoys losing herself are compared to her dark secret addiction that she eventually decides to abandon:

> Era el veinticuatro de septiembre, lo recuerda muy bien, día de la Merced. Antes de alejarse de los oscuros laberintos del barrio gótico, de los

> llamados ciegos como el de San Cucufat, esos pasajes apenas anchos para permitir el paso de dos personas hombro con hombro donde le gustaba perderse por las madrugadas al salir del bar, fue a despedirse de todo ese submundo tan denso donde había intentado buscar alguna forma de la verdad. (123)

She never returns to the Barrio Gótico, not even to pick up her salary, just as she never again writes to Facundo: "decidió mudarse del diminuto apartamento en el bellísimo derruido palacio de la calle des Escudellers llena de putas y cruzar la Diagonal *como quien cruza una frontera para no volver nunca más al territorio prohibido*" (122-23; my emphasis). That moment marks the beginning of a new chapter of her life, and is the first step in the search for her own redemption to overcome her abuse.

During all the years of exile and travel Marcela has tried to forget her oppressive past, but the memory of it eventually resurfaces fully through the rediscovery of the letters and she needs to face *herself*, as the person who wrote them: "Asomarse a ésa su actividad oculta: sus cartas a F. Por qué las escribió, se pregunta ahora como se ha preguntado mil veces, sin atinar respuesta. Sin osar formular una respuesta" (121). An important step is to unburden herself, tell someone about her "shameful" past. She confesses first to one of her lovers, Joe, a heroin addict, but her confession is incomplete: "sólo logra aceptar que es humana porque ha cometido errores. Está viva" (195). She feels overwhelmed by the fear of giving power over herself to Joe, of belonging to a man: "con la confesión se ha entregado de pies y manos a Joe, ahora le pertenece" (195). This is something she deliberately tried to avoid in relationships with men after Facundo, so that in all those to which she refers, she remains somewhat uncommitted and does not expose her vulnerability.

Joe has one valuable suggestion after hearing her story: to perform a "general cleansing" of her demons "para que el agua fría te lave, te lave, te lave" (194). Indeed, when recognizing that she needs to deal with the letters and her *porteño* experiences and what they represent, she realizes that she might resort to art to exorcize her fears and traumas. This is one reason why New York turns out to be a perfect setting. Manhattan is undoubtedly synonymous with art and creativity. Many of Marcela's friends are artists and represent their passions and feelings through various forms of powerful artistic expression. Ava Taurel, the dominatrix, involves Marcela in her artistic game of seduction. Another time, when a hurricane destroys the fragile glass sculpture set up by her friend Raquel on the banks of the Hudson, she is amazed to see another work of art in the pile of broken glass crystals:

> De no haber sido vidrio de seguridad se habría roto en pedazos disímiles, caóticos, de muy variadas formas y medidas. Algo más peligroso y más interesante. Si tuviera un soplete o quizá un rayo laser podría convertir este montón de vidrio en montaña de lava, casi de obsidiana. Algo mucho más sólido ¿y quién quiere la solidez renunciando a la movilidad de las partes? (65)

Perhaps the most influential representation of the healing power of art in the novel is Bolek's project in Creedmore, Queens, New York, where he directs the inmates of the asylum to transform the unused spaces of the building into a "Museo Viviente": "pinten, les dice, pinten, y los locos que estaban abocados a blanquear las paredes toman las pinturas de colores y van creando gigantescos murales, grafitos incomprensibles que quedarán allí por un tiempo, hasta que se aburran o surja una idea diferente" (63). Painted walls and artistic collages are nothing more than a way of exorcizing the patients' phobias and madness through art. Their uncontrolled energy is focussed towards creative expression: "Antes de Bolek no éramos nadie,

pasábamos nuestros días sin ser nadie, sin conocernos ni mirarnos al espejo, ahora cada día al despertarnos sabemos que somos artistas, dice una de las pacientes y otros asienten" (63). Bolek also pushes Marcela to convert her experiences and traumas into art. He believes that New York, "ciudad de los locos" (233), will make her create something beautiful out of her pain. He points out that until she does so, her memories will hurt and slowly destroy her: "te persigue la memoria de los desaparecidos, mi querida porteñita, es lógico, pero acá estamos en la capital de la despersonalización y de la repersonalización por otro wing everyone can reinvent himself" (205). One way of retrieving her past that he suggests is writing a novel on the basis of her erotic letters, although she feels reluctant to reveal her story and her Buenos Aires to anyone:

> hubo quien le dijo: retoma tu historia personal y conviértela en una forma de arte – tan lejos de aquel otro, de aquellos otros que pretendieron hacerle eliminar del todo esta historia que camina a la par de ella –. Rework your battle ground, le dijo aquél sin saber hasta qué punto estaba dando en anco. Retrabaja tu campo de batalla, le dijo [...]. (272)

In the end, she initiates a correspondence with Bolek. They begin writing an epistolary novel together, which is, in a way, a continuation of her letter-writing to Facundo.

It is not until she goes out of the city, however, during her stay in the country cottage of a friend, when she realizes she has become vulnerable, sentimental, and emotional, feelings from which she can no longer break away. She then resolves to face her demons: "No quiero escapar más. El camino que sigo es mi camino aunque no lo conozca" (367). In order to overcome her past, she decides to destroy the letters during a party she throws in the Creedmore asylum for Bolek. In hopes of a cathartic

experience she wants to burn them in a suitcase filled with unknown passports and identity cards that had previously been found on a street in New York by her friend Joe. The act of putting her own letters into the suitcase symbolizes the annihilation of her past identity. However, once the suitcase is actually burning, Marcela panics and realizes that destruction is not the right way to overcome her obsession with Facundo. She saves her letters from the fire and through that particular act of recognizing Facundo as part of her life, as opposed to a reprehensible secret, also retrieves herself and the lost Buenos Aires. Only then, does she feel comfortable with herself so that her life in Buenos Aires can become part of the story about herself she can finally reveal to her friends:

> Es Jerome, con su mejor ojo de investigador del Secreto, quien le pregunta qué fue lo que rescató ella del fuego. Y ella ya no siente la necesidad de ocultar nada y contesta desaprensiva: Cartas, escritas por mí, todas de falsa calentura, mis cartas a Facundo un ex marido secreto que tuve [...] Fantástico, ronronea Ava [...] cartas de falsa calentura, pueden resultar muuuy estimulantes. Quizá no sea tan falsa después de todo, se retracta ella apretando el fajo contra su vientre; ahora entiendo el placer, el gozo que me dio escribirlas. Si quieren se las leo... (404-05)

Only when she regains the control over the letters, does she realize that *she* is a subject, a center of her own life, a feeling that brings about the sensation of empowerment: "Sin mí no hay abanico sin mí en realidad no hay nada... para mí" (412). She can now go back to Buenos Aires, and decides to do so to the surprise of everyone, herself included:

> Me vuelvo a Argentina, le informa ella – se informa – sin haberlo pensado. Y queda como en suspenso, con la boca semiabierta. [...] En un relámpago percibe que ya no necesita coraza ni armadura ni nada, solo esta sensación de haber encontrado el propio espacio y de haberlo cinrunscripto. Todo cuaja. Todo está en su lugar. (411)

Right when she makes a decision to confront her past, symbolically, the woman who was just a "she", textualized through the distanced third person narration throughout the entire novel, reclaims her name and becomes a real person, Marcela: "Y sí, yo, Marcela Osorio, de cuerpo entero, créase o no me vuelvo a BAires. Falto desde hace más de veinte años, sonó la hora de enfrentar tanto gato encerrado que dejé por allá" (412).

On the whole, it is clear that New York experienced through the material practice of *flânerie* brings another place, the Buenos Aires of her memory, into form. A passage through New York therefore leads to the re-discovery of the lost place, which forms the crucial part of Marcela's identity. Her relationship of perpetual mobility with the chaos of New York and its inhabitants results in her recollection of pieces of Buenos Aires and the recovery of the part of herself that was lost when she left. Bringing a female subjectivity to the novel of exile, Valenzuela contributes to our understanding of the relationship that displaced people have with places of their present and past.

What we learn about Marcela's experience in Argentina makes us understand what Buenos Aires means to her and why she was constantly moving, trying to escape. At the end of the novel, she lets go of that particular construction of Buenos Aires; a "frozen" image of the past is "updated" through a long process of self-discovery and empowerment. The Buenos Aires she will most likely encounter upon her return will not be the same place that she knew, mirroring the place her memory and projections froze in time. This image is not relevant anymore, because she has allowed herself to open up to other possibilities. By admitting the fact that she will

need to establish a new relationship with the city, she accepts that her sense of place is a temporary constellation of the "here and now", progressive and always changing. She will have to re-invent the city through a constant renegotiation of her feelings.

The experience described in the novel is one that Luisa Valenzula herself has known. Speaking in an interview about one of her visits to Buenos Aires, she recognizes the importance and power of the absent city, and the impossibility of fully recuperating it:

> Cierta noche [...] salí a caminar por Belgrano, las calles de mi infancia, y de golpe me empezó a dar un ataque de llanto. Lloraba porque partes del barrio habían cambiado, y lloraba porque muchas casas y esquinas seguían igual. [....] Entendí que había estado llorando no porque echara de menos un lugar – Buenos Aires o el barrio de Belgrano – sino un tiempo. Echaba de menos los tiempos de antes de la dictadura. Porque finalmente una ciudad es sobre todo la presencia humana, y lo que ocurre en sus calles puede hacerla radiante u opaca. Amiga u hostil. La ciudad es como una esponja, lo absorbe todo, y los miedos y las emociones exudan de las paredes como una sustancia perceptible. (Biblija, website)

In a similar manner, *La travesía* is a story of Marcela's relationship with both cities not told from the outside, but from the inside. Coinciding with some of the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan, New York and Buenos Aires are, for her, basic elements in the ordering of her experiences of the world. The novel plays with the commonly shared images of New York and Buenos Aires, only to subvert them through her subjectivity. It shows how identity is created in terms of places. The loss of Buenos Aires represents a lost identity which is symbolically recuperated when Marcela regains her identity.

The unconventional narrative chosen for this "apocryphal autobiography" with its alternation of voices between first and third person and a plot whose coherence is disrupted by constant flashbacks and memories, leave the reader guessing, trying to make sense of the chaotic, fragmentary structure of the novel. Yet,

this sense of loss and disorientation is all a part of Marcela's *travesía*, her passage through the troubled city of her past that is eventually exorcized by her *flânerie* in New York, because in the end "el viejo tango de la pura nostalgia no le importa, la felicidad le importa" (413).

CHAPTER 5

GOING HOME: INTIMATE GEOGRAPHIES IN *EL CIELO DIVIDIDO* BY REINA ROFFÉ

At the end of Luisa Valenzuela's *La travesía*, her main character, Marcela Osorio, takes the most important decision that any expatriate can take: she is going back home. She had been trying to remove her home place – Buenos Aires – from her mind for over twenty years in exile, but it turned out to be impossible because the city came back to her through memories, making it clear that she had to deal with her Argentinean past. Her decision to go home ends a long process of self-discovery through *flânerie* in New York. As soon as she is able to recognize Buenos Aires as an intrinsic part of her life, she recovers her sense of identity and makes a decision to confront the place she once felt compelled to leave. The novel ends there, with her departure still at some point in the future. While Valenzuela describes the experience of the place of exile (New York) and conveys images of the place abandoned (Buenos Aires), she does not tell us anything about the experience of return. In this respect, *El cielo dividido* by Reina Roffé in a way continues where *La travesía* ends by providing a second part to the story: the return to Buenos Aires. Of course, Marcela's life back in Buenos Aires would likely have been very different from that experienced by Roffé's protagonist, but she would have shared some of the experiences and consequences of return common to many exiles who go back to their place of origin. She probably would have felt the initial cultural shock of arrival, a sense of alienation

and disorientation, and she would have attempted to reconnect with the place, people, and the lost past.

Going home is never easy. As Doreen Massey comments, migrants "imagine 'home' the place they used to be, as it used to be" (2005: 123). This imaginary construct is very powerful because the history of one's place somehow stops at the point one leaves it (123). The sense of place that exiles have of their homes is inevitably based on their nostalgic fixation on their particular idea of the identity of home. Moreover, in their minds, they never evoke just a specific place but also a particular time. Thus, Massey's concept of a "spatio-temporal event" may serve for our analysis of the experience of return.

An exile rarely recognizes that, just as she has moved on, places have moved on also. The movement that has changed her life has also changed the place left behind. An exile goes home expecting this familiar place to be present still, but the reality of the return is often so different from what was once so well known, that the reconciliation of one's expectations of a place with what it has become may be almost impossible. Massey, optimistically, calls for a progressive sense of place, a self-conscious realization that the places we encounter have become something different from what we knew before, so that we have to be open to new "spatio-temporal events", new encounters with home. These will create a new sense of place, although always only temporarily. While it is important to realize, following Massey, that we cannot hold places still or track backwards in space-time (125), nevertheless, it is only human to constantly try do so. Since exiles often define themselves against the place

they have left, their identity becomes intrinsically connected to the places of their past, reason enough for their return to become an extremely emotional struggle.

The theme of home and return has been present in the literature of Latin America for a long time. As outlined in my third chapter, there are many Argentinean texts such as Borges' poems, Cortázar's novels and short stories, or tangos that evoke the difficulties of re-negotiation of the exile's expectations with the present reality of the place of return. This re-negotiation usually generates feelings of isolation and nostalgia. Such is *El cielo dividido* by Reina Roffé, a story of the return of Eleonora Ellis, an Argentinean, thirty-three years of age, to her home in Buenos Aires after a long period of time spent in exile in the United States. The novel narrates the first months after her return, when Eleonora is overwhelmed by feelings of displacement in her home place and tries desperately to reconnect with *her* Buenos Aires, both the city and its people.

She is in the middle of writing her doctoral dissertation, and we learn at the very beginning of the novel that the pretext for her visit after 10 years of living outside Argentina is to complete research and write her thesis in Buenos Aires. The topic of her dissertation is an important detail. She mentions the figure of "El Estudiante" whom she studies and intends to describe in her dissertation. He exists in her notes as a symbolic representative of the terror, a representation of official history. However, Eleonora never says explicitly what her topic is. Different allusions to it and its context make it clear that her work is related to the history of repression and terror in Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s. In the end, however, Eleonora does not write the academic text about the dictatorship she was intent on. Instead, she

re-tells her own intimate stories of love and memories, as well as those of other female characters, her friends Alia, Irma, Celia, and Lisa and her lovers Giselle, Donna and Mijal. In this context, Roffé draws a map of Eleonora's emotional Buenos Aires, a city of passions and feelings.

In addition to her attempts to recover the Buenos Aires of her memories and emotions, Eleonora tries to feel an intimacy for her city through a very particular kind of *flânerie*, a sensory meeting with the place. She sees, hears, smells, feels, and touches the city, in an attempt to diminish the distance that her absence has created. Her practice is reminiscent of Yi-Fu Tuan's idea of the experiential perception of the city that can produce feelings of attachment: "a place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind" (18). Our intimate geographies form part of our identity, so that when we are removed in space from them, we have to recreate our relationships with old and new places. In this respect, Buenos Aires in *El cielo dividido* is not an absent city of the mind, but a present setting of the main character, which she explores through her senses, creating a sensual geography that is very different from the male/official representation of the city created in much of the literature of the past. The familiar, iconic image of Buenos Aires, with its avenues, plazas, and buildings is absent in Roffé's fragmentary and intimate narration of *her* city. The traditional male gaze on Buenos Aires is challenged in *El cielo dividido* where the female character reads the city in a very intimate and sensual way ignoring Buenos Aires' position as a symbol of official history of Argentina.

Out of place: *a la intemperie* in the male city

Eleonora Ellis, just as Reina Roffé herself, was forced to leave Buenos Aires during the time of the dictatorship in order to escape censorship and repression. Her beginnings in exile were not easy, as she had to adapt to a new environment, a new language, a cooler climate, and feelings of rootlessnes (147). But when Eleonora first comes back to Buenos Aires, she is overwhelmed by similar feelings of anxiety and loneliness, and a growing sensation of suffocation. Her first days are

> gobernados por una sensación de ahogo: las calles estrechas, el smog, la amenaza de un sueño. Se veía discando números telefónicos, entregada a la tarea de hallar a las personas que algo habían significado para ella. El aire que respiraba era escaso para aliviarla. (Roffé: 14).

Abruptly removed from the safety of her apartment in Princeton, Eleonora feels alienated and paralyzed in Buenos Aires (140). Her first walk through the city provokes contradictory feelings and a sensation of being "in the open air", *a la intemperie*, not only literally, but also metaphorically:

> Eleonora salió a la calle despedida, al fin, hacia la noche. [...] Circulaban todavía muchos autos, y de ellos le llegaban algunas voces de las que sólo podía registrar una que otra palabra. Después oyó que alguien decía que se anotaría en un *avión*, no entendió lo que esto significaba, pero se alegró de que la gente, en la calle, hablara su misma lengua. Luego esa alegría le produjo recelo. Extrañó los pinos que amurallaban su hogar en Princeton. Qué hacía en esta otra punta del mapa donde nunca había sido feliz. A qué había vuelto a la ciudad de su desdicha. [...] Sintió que estaba a la intemperie. (22-23)

Buenos Aires is frequently described in the novel in terms of its weather conditions. Eleonora often feels that the city's rough weather corresponds to her own state of mind: "su cuerpo era de una espesura poco común: hostil como el clima" (24). On one of the first days "su madre entró en el cuarto y levantó la persiana. Llovía torrencialmente. [...] Eleonora dijo: 'Dormí tensa y encogida. Llueve.' Su

madre replicó: 'No llueve, diluvia'"(23). By contrast, through the memories of a Princeton snowstorm, she recalls the calmness and tranquility of her stay in America: "caminó en la quietud de las calles del pueblo, después de la tormenta, hasta llegar a un rellano blanquísimo, donde dibujó un angel y tembló por el espectáculo que se le ofrecía a sus ojos [...] por qué diablos tenía tanta añoranza de la nieve [...]" (52-53). In Buenos Aires, sensations of cold and humidity, typical of *porteño* weather, persist and intensify Eleonora's feelings of disorientation:

> Anduvieron bajo un cernidillo frío que golpeaba sobre el cieno de las calles y levantaba lodo, ensuciaba cada paso. [...] De un tiempo a esta parte, los paisajes tristes (por la ventana, la calle era un páramo gris) habían dejado de referir a Eleonora a la atmósfera idónea de una nostalgia confortable, para remitirla al acoso de la angustia. El café y una copa del licor apenas le devolvieron un poco de calor al cuerpo. [...] En la librería, volvió a sentir que se congregaban en ella la sensación de no pertenencia y el consecuente repudio por todo lo que la rodeaba. (122-23)

It seems that frequent rain and the consequent grayness of the city contribute to the total estrangement of Eleonora in Buenos Aires, "una ciudad gris y beige" (65):

> Eleonora tuvo un fuerte sentimiento de extrañeza. Intentó dilucidar ese sentimiento, esa idea corrosiva de no pertenecer a nada, a nadie; de estar aquí y allá ajena al timepo y al espacio. Quiso tocarle a frente, limpiar el sudor de su cara. No pudo. Había perdido las formas de su cuerpo, se había disuelto en sustancia. No de aquí ni de allá. Pensó que esto sería notable, notable por su monstruosidad. (55)

The recurrent images of the gray, rainy, cold city evoked in the novel are an evident metaphor for Eleonora's own uneasiness, helplessness, discouragement and out-of-placeness upon her return to Buenos Aires.

Eleonora's experience of alienation and isolation, as well as a growing sense of confusion and disorientation is textualized in the fragmented narration of the novel. Even though she tries to re-establish order in her universe by re-living or, similar to

Valenzuela's main character, exorcizing through the art of writing the traumatic experiences of the dictatorship that forced her to leave the country, she fails. As she tries to write a thesis that will bring her back to the Buenos Aires of her past and of official history, feelings of alienation and out-of-placeness become overwhelming and she abandons her project. Instead, Eleonora decides to re-live the city through present people and places, giving way to a narration that is very different from what any academic thesis could look like.

In her article "Entre mujeres: sexo, pasión y escritura en *El cielo dividido* de Reina Roffé", Mónica Szurmuk explores the possibility of seeing Reina Roffé's novel as a subjective discourse capable of re-telling, thanks to its fragmented narration, the history of dictatorship in Argentina in a way that differs from official masculine, patriarchal metanarratives, giving a voice to women through micro-histories. *El cielo dividido* "cuenta historias personales y corporales como única alternativa para situar una subjetividad femenina al margen de las metanarrativas patriarcales" (Szurmuk: 273):

> El terror como experiencia límite se recupera discursivamente a través de recuerdos fragmentados. Eleonora Ellis intenta escribir un texto académico – su disertación – que enlace los diferentes fragmentos y les dé una cierta totalidad y clausura. En lugar de este texto totalizador, Eleonora recoge en las voces de las mujeres que son sus amigas y amantes una narrativa personal, precisa, y pormenorizada de un regreso y de una pequeña gran historia de amor. (Szurmuk: 275)

Szurmuk's analysis of the novel points out how Roffé's narration reflects postmodern codes of representation through its "múltiples discursos, múltiples niveles de lectura y una serie de citas que refieren a productos culturales diversos como la ópera, los manuales de lectura escolares y obras de la lectura occidental" (276). It challenges

official history and explores the possibility of discourse after traumatic experiences of terror:

> El texto de Roffé funciona como un espejo que refleja tres maneras de contar la historia: la historia oficial, las historias contestarias y las micro-historias subalternas. Tanto la historia oficial como las versiones contestarias de la historia son enfoques de arriba hacia abajo, lecturas de la historia desde los marcos legales, politicos e institucionales. Las micro-historias subalternas que cuenta Roffé se ubican en los espacios asociados con lo femenino: la casa-isla de Alia, el departamento de Eleonora, la casa materna de Eleonora. (276)

Szurmuk's observations regarding the purpose of the fragmented female micro-histories in Roffé's narration, "íntimas, subjetivas, cotidianas [...] registradas en los cuerpos, en las narrativas alternativas, en los espacios marginales de la cultura dominante" (276-77), are worth pursuing and may serve as a point of departure for discovering how the novel's fragmentary narration, mixed voices, and lack of order, contributes to how the author represents the confusion of the return from exile, and Eleonora's attempt to deal with reality. With this in mind, a closer look at the mechanisms of narration in the novel will be undertaken.

El cielo dividido is divided into three parts, each corresponding to a different stage of Eleonora's re-accommodation to the city. The first stage is concerned with her initial impressions during her stay in her mother's apartment. It is a time when Eleonora tries to recognize the city and fails to make sense of it, and it ends with her awaiting her husband at the airport. The reader never learns about their re-encounter, however, and the second part sees Eleonora in her new apartment and describes her meeting and liaison with Mijal, her lover, who moves in with her. This is also the part of the novel in which Eleonora experiences the city most intensely. Then, in the last part of the novel, Eleonora fights and breaks up twice with her girlfriend. She also has

an emblematic vision of the destruction of her surroundings that symbolizes the total disintegration of her world as she knew it. The experience is enough for her to decide not to go back to the United States where she had lived in exile, but to stay in Buenos Aires.

Even though the three parts describe quite different stages of Eleonora's life back in the city, they all share one common characteristic: a fragmentary and chaotic narration, composed of blocks of text in different voices. As Szurmuk remarks, everything that happens in the story is narrated through multiple mediations: "todo lo 'sucedido' en la novela es transmitido al lector a través de narraciones extrañadas, de ecos de voces. El/la narrador/a en tercera persona nos relata lo que Alia le dice a Eleonora o lo que Eleonora cree escuchar con la mediación de teléfono" (274). The third person narration is disrupted by the voices of different characters, fragments of the diary/novel Eleonora is supposedly writing, references to her readings, or other apparently random observations.

This fragmentation often makes it difficult for the reader to understand the order of events, which are also retold several times. An event, such as Eleonora's meeting with her friend Donna, a touchstone that marks her first lesbian affair, is anticipated, told, retold, and remembered several times in different blocks of narration that present different points of view. In the end, we are confronted with several versions of the same event as we witness Eleonora's or another character's narrative about the meeting and the meeting itself.

Donna is introduced on page 26 when the third person narrator tells us about her:

> releyó la carta de Frank y memorizó el número de teléfono de Donna. De pronto se sorprendió tartareando un aria de Madame Butterfly y convirtiendo la pantalla oscura de la televisión en un escenario animado sobre el cual Donna Caravaggio era María Callas.

Roffé then uses a technique whereby Eleonora's story of her encounter with Donna is told by a third person narrator who also conveys a future conversation during which Eleonora will narrate the meeting to Mijal telling it as an event from the past. The conditional tense that introduces it, however, indicates a future in the past as if it were yet to occur:

> *Así le contaría a Mijal* su primer encuentro con Donna: "Salí de casa con mucho tiempo de antelación. Tenía deseos de caminar [...] Pensé, divertida, cómo quedaría un ramillete de jasmines en el escote del negro, ceñido traje de Donna Caravaggio. Por cierto ella no tenía un traje negro, ceñido ni escotado cuando llegué al bar donde habíamos convenido la cita. (27; my emphasis)

A similar technique is used several times when Eleonora's stories are (re)told in a future-in-the-past either to her lover Mijal or her friend Alia, so that we learn about certain events as they occurred, so to speak, and as they are narrated.

After the segment of narration in Eleonora's first person, on page 28 we come back to the narrator's third person discourse: "Eleonora se había detenido frente al escaparate". Here, the account of the meeting is interrupted by the description of Eleonora's walk to the rendezvous, and the introduction of her thoughts and the sudden memory of something her mother had said, some of it conveyed in the narrator's indirect free discourse. In the end, the reader comes back to the actual meeting and a direct dialogue between Donna and Eleonora. It is soon disrupted again, however, by Eleonora's reminiscences of Roberto's opinions about Donna

given in the third person. By the end of the meeting, Eleonora is completely lost in her thoughts, just like the reader, lost in the incoherent and non-linear narration.

This same meeting is evoked on two more occasions, from different perspectives, giving a new feel to the event. On page 117, Eleonora changes her story slightly while telling it to Mijal:

> [Mijal] la indujo a recostarse sobre la cama y a errar otra vez por sus historias. Eligió, no por azar, relatarle a Mijal su primer encuentro con Donna Caravaggio.
>
> – Ya sé que no se parece ni remotamente a la María Callas del separador que está sobre mi escritorio – dijo –, pero ése era, más o menos, el retrato que me había hecho de ella.

Then, at the end of the novel we suddenly come back to the encounter in the café, as if it were a recent occurrence. The third person omniscient narrator comments: "Cuando Eleonora se sentó, ella [Mijal] comenzó a hablar," and Mijal's direct discourse follows: "Hoy Donna evocó aquella gloriosa tarde en la que te vio entrar por la puerta, creo que dio: 'Como una reina que ha dejado sus anillos afuera'" (132). As this example illustrates, the same event is told and framed by different voices, all framed themselves within the third person narrative, re-telling the same story and adding pieces to a simple urban café encounter thereby causing it to be fragmented and seen from different points of view. The reader is easily lost in the mix of memories, reflections, and dialogues of various characters as the movement from one voice to another is abrupt and often requires rereading.

The narrative style described in the preceding commentary textualizes the complex world of Eleonora, a newcomer to Buenos Aires with a history of the city, who has to deal with an unrecognizable reality that is constantly filtered through the images of her memory and reminiscences of other peoples' stories. The picture of

Buenos Aires that emerges from such a chaotic account of the protagonist's experiences in the city resembles a puzzle where the pieces do not quite fit. Eleonora's impossibility of instilling order into her experiences and her image of reality is captured by the fragmentary narration.

The pure chaos of intimate impressions and subjective interpretations of the reality of Buenos Aires is created by a female character through narrative mechanisms that, as we shall see in due course, provide a gendered female perspective of the experience of the city. Not coincidentally, masculine points of view are rare in the novel. The only male view of historical events in Buenos Aires is obtained from the writings of Roberto Suárez, a Peronist and friend of Eleonora who had been writing politically charged letters to her throughout all the years of her absence from Argentina. The narrative of his letters, which Eleonora brought back with her to Buenos Aires, is linear and chronological (277). They represent an individual, non-conformist testimony to the events of dictatorship that helps to order personal histories in the context of the history of Argentina. Their ordering male voice figures at the end of the first part of the novel, perhaps as a more coherent explanation for a confused reader. Roberto's letters provide simplifying background information necessary to understand what is told in the novel. He explains the situation in Argentina straightforwardly: "la gente está preocupada y triste: treinta mil desaparecidos, las Malvinas, una guerra estúpida, movilizaciones, marchas por los derechos humanos, rebeliones inútiles y horror" (71). In the same, simple and clarifying way, he talks about his feelings: "Mi vida, como siempre. Los libros hechos

y los libros por hacer, el mundo pequeño. También aquello que nos pasa a los hombres: el amor que llega y lo dejamos ir" (71).

Roberto's coherent narrative was very important for Eleonora during her stay in America, she recalls waiting anxiously for the postman who would bring her news from Roberto: "toda acción estaba sujeta a la hora en que habitualmente llegaba el funcionario con su uniforme azul a hacer el reparto" (72). Back in Buenos Aires she needs to re-read the letters, hoping that a look at *porteño* reality through men's eyes will help her get her bearings and provide some meaning to the incoherent reality of Buenos Aires she has encountered upon her return:

> deseaba releer, como se relee el fragmento de una novela que en algún momento se ha subrayado tímidamente para facilitar la tarea de saborear, cada vez que apetezca, los pocos signos que conjugan la parte esencial de una historia y que, por alguna razón misteriosa nos develan a nosotros mismos. (70)

Eleonora eventually meets with Roberto, hoping that his ordered universe will help her assemble the pieces of her own, fragmented world. The night they spend together is a necessary step for Eleonora, since only then can she manage to overcome her nostalgic feelings for Roberto. He seems to be exactly what Buenos Aires has become for her: a lost love that she used to desire but is no longer the same once she possesses it again. She does not have the same feelings she once had for the man or for the city, in spite of having cultivated the memory of them both throughout the years of her exile. She comments on the night with Roberto:

> Supo que la entrega, en apariencia espontánea, había sido premeditada; no solo respondía a la melancolía del deseo, sino también a la urgencia de saldar una cuenta pendiente que arrastraba desde hacía años. [...] Nada nuevo descubrieron el uno en el otro, todo en ellos era pura nostalgia y un poco de gratitud. Al recordar los preámbulos aduladores de ese conquistador de la vieja escuela que era Roberto, un poco tanguero y un

> poco romántico, se enterneció, a pesar de que rayaban en el ridículo. (141-42)

In the United States, Eleonora tried to organize her life around another man, her husband, Spanish professor Frank Brumer. Like the main character of *La travesía,* Eleonora met him at a university, while studying at Princeton in her case. Unlike Facundo Zuberbühler, however, Frank did not try to control or manipulate her life. Instead, he subordinated Eleonora to his comfortable, although passionless, routine. Eleonora had only been able to live for a while with "un marido que tranquiliza, aplaca la paranoia" (41), "su eje [...] el lugar seguro" (77). Although she admits having enjoyed the serenity of the routine of her life with Frank, she also recalls the boredom, and the discrepancy between Frank's worldview and her own. Her feelings of being out of place in exile are perhaps best expressed by a description of the image Eleonora used to see through the window in Princeton while waiting for a postman to bring letters from her past life in Argentina. What she sees is the dull, deserted landscape of a North American town: "no podía más que agazaparse frente a la ventana y espíar el movimiento de la calle, ese afuera desolado y fantasmal de los pueblos del este, en los que nunca se sabe por dónde pasa la vida" (72).

Eleonora could not see her life continuing as it was in the United States. Her husband's regular routine and his rational approach to reality were not how she perceived her structurally fragmented world through her senses and emotions. Her female perspective, decidedly different from the way Roberto Suárez or her husband Frank saw reality, distanced Eleonora from the men in her life. Her experience of the city and her sense of place are very different from those evoked by male voices. Hers

is an intimate, sensory environment that she does not attempt to order into a historical discourse, but to explore as a *flâneuse*.

The intimate city: sensory *flânerie*

Like Valenzuela's *La travesía*, *El cielo dividido* has an incoherent plot and a narrative difficult to follow at times, but the images of New York and Buenos Aires and the experiences of the *flâneuse* are, in the end, very grounded in the reality of both cities. In Roffé's novel, the sensory *flânerie* through which Eleonora experiences the city does not mean that the culturally accepted image of the city is non-existent. Actual streets and place names rarely surface, but one occasion is worth mentioning because it shows how Eleonora perceives reminders of the terror of dictatorship and female responses to official history. When she walks by the Plaza de Mayo, she observes the mothers of the disappeared, a glimpse of the real Buenos Aires that reminds her of "los dictámenes que hablaban de un cuerpo enfermo; poco después, empezaron a curarlo. De la cirugía mayor, de su criminal eficacia, sabían las mujeres de pañuelos blancos" (109).

In general, as mentioned, real places rarely appear in the narrative, and most images of real cityscapes occur in the narration of Roberto Suárez, an ordering male voice. However, although the story of *El cielo dividido* is set in Buenos Aires, the actual name is never mentioned throughout the entire novel, and the city is referred to as *la ciudad*. The Argentinean capital is recognizable because of references to some widely known *porteño* places such as la Boca or la Plaza de Mayo, Calle Corrientes, or historical events, such as the aforementioned Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. But this

omission of explicit engagement with the iconic landscape of the city does not mean that Buenos Aires could be substituted with any other city in this novel. The city of historical places and events is rendered silent, almost absent, reflecting Eleonora's difficulty in engaging with it and also giving way to the turbulent city of senses, feelings and emotions of all kinds, and in a way that the female characters perceive and experience it.

Eleonora understands that, in order to recover the city of her past and the ability to lead a meaningful life in Buenos Aires, she needs to feel it through her body. She leaves her small apartment and attempts to establish sensual links with the present city. After an initial period of being constantly lost, she walks around it more and more, trying to rescue its streets, parks, plazas, bookstores, and cafés from her own oblivion. She feels a need to walk through the familiar places of her past that used to be part of her everyday life and she is happy whenever she can remember routes she used to take or buildings she used to pass by in the past. While practising a sensual *flânerie* in the city, Eleonora trusts her bodily memory as a means to remember places. In this way, as "la memoria de Eleonora [recupera] la escena y, con ella, los hilos dispersos en el tiempo" (29), she begins to recover the ten years she lost while absent:

> Caminé por las inmediaciones del edificio reconociendo el barrio, registrando dónde estaban los comercios. Descubrí el Mercado, la oficina de correos, un almacén, la farmacia. Cada hallazgo me llenaba de alegría, una alegría llana pero próbida: iba haciendo mías estas calles, iba siendo yo de estas calles. Luego me dirigí hacia el centro y de ahí hacia el río. […] De cualquier forma, me dejé llevar por el encanto de este atardecer y la noche que empezaba a encaramarse en lo alto de los edificios. Me estaba reconciliando con la ciudad y no quería que nada empañara este sentimiento. (83-84)

Eleonora's sensual encounters with the urban environment are the principal way in which the city is rendered: "mis sentidos, aunque turbios, [están] alerta, acechando el filo de la navaja que templa el aire y trasiega el silencio" (48). All her senses are constantly engaged; she absorbs the sounds, smells, and tastes of the city, just as she is mesmerized by touch: "el agua tibia intensificaba la sensación de que el alma había vuelto al cuerpo" (36). However, her visual experience is often blurred because she is either half asleep or in darkness: "Eleonora abrió los ojos, vio una silueta difusa y tiesa en la penumbra [...]" (64). The light influences her mood significantly, the sunlight has the capacity to cheer and encourage her and she notices how the light of a candle plays with shadows: "la luz difusa de una vela las multiplicaba en los azulejos del baño con empecinada distorsión" (122), while "el crepúsculo, la hora del crepúsculo engañaba los sentidos" (88). She is afraid of darkness, and on the night of a blackout in the city that followed an electrical storm she feels threatened and vulnerable.

Buenos Aires has its own distinctive auditory and olfactory geography for Eleonora. The sounds of the city constantly disturb her, especially immediately after her return. Loud music causes her anxiety: "que bajes la música o la quites, por favor" (61); she is disturbed by "el campanilleo del teléfono" (62) or the sound of the doorbell that "la devolvía empecinadamente a la realidad" (96). The streets are noisy too: "en la calle, unos obreros destrozaban la acera aledaña al bar. [...] El ruido ensordecía y aguzaba la zozobra. Si alguna quiso hablar, el estrépito se lo impidió" (133). The chaos of Buenos Aires is contrasted with the calming sounds of Princeton, which Eleonora remembers with some feelings of melancholy and nostalgia:

> Esa mañana tenía el sonido alegre de riego. Frank iniciaba cada día, en la casa, regando el jardín. El borbollar melodioso del agua prodigándose sobre la tierra con el que Eleonora despertaba en Princeton, ahora remedaba en ella sensaciones análogas de placidez y dicha. (34)

Eleonora's Buenos Aires tastes and smells of coffee; she drinks it all the time in bars or at home. Her mother and other female characters also drink it constantly for the "ánimo, una energía elemental" (82) it instills in them. The habit of frequenting *porteño* cafés reconnects Eleonora to the city of her past and to the long tradition of cafés in Buenos Aires as gathering places and centres of social life. Other descriptions of olfactory sensations include clean, fresh air, a recurring motif: "tenía ganas de salir a la calle y respirar un aire menos viciado" (54) "el aire de la calle avivó las brasas de su estómago" (56). The unpleasant smells she notices are mentioned mostly at the beginning of the novel, when Buenos Aires still feels hostile: "recurrió a sus pañuelos de papel; también al frasquito de perfume que intencionadamente llevaba en el bolso para recomponerse del olor a orines de los baños públicos" (31); "el viejo café de la Boca, [...] aún seguía manteniendo su inconfundible aroma a vino agrio, aserrín y orines" (84). But when the city, after days of rain, fills with sun and fresh, aromatic air, Eleonora absorbs it with her body and mind:

> Las calles de la ciudad olían a gloria. Era el atardecer más lindo que había visto en años. Ya no hacía calor y había en el aire tanta vida, o yo tenía tantas ganas de vivir, después del tiempo de internación al que me había sometido por propia voluntad, que anduve como si me hubiesen crecido alas. (83)

Finally, when Eleonora settles into her apartment, she begins to feel at home only when it acquires "cierto toque personal y hasta olor de su piel, de su perfume" (84). In the same way, the street noises stop bothering her and she learns to live with them:

"sus días y noches alejados de todo murmullo que no fuese el que llegaba de la calle o de los departamentos aledaños" (168).

El cielo dividido and *La travesía* evoke the city in a very different way because Marcela in Valenzuela's novel is remembering the city rather than being actually located in it. Similarly, the experience of *flânerie* has a distinctive character and purpose in each text. Eleonora's walks in the city do not have the "anthropologizing" character of Marcela's *flânerie* in New York City, which is a place of self-discovery as well as discovery of the absent city of her mind. Particular places in New York serve as stimulating environments, often in the different examples of artistic expression that help Marcela to re-discover herself and reclaim her identity as a *porteña*. In *El cielo dividido*, by contrast, Eleonora practices *flânerie* in unnamed cityscapes; she absorbs them in every possible sensorial way in order to recover the unfamiliar place of her present. She is unconcerned about describing the inhabitants of the city coherently, and is not interested in studying their behavior or participating in their lives. She is only interested in her own relationships and in bonding with the city, which she acquires subconsciously through all subjective manifestations experienced through her sensory *flânerie*. Thus, the city of Buenos Aires is never described in *El cielo dividido* in the way that New York is described in *La travesía*. It is not possible to draw a map of Eleonora's meanderings, because her city is evoked in a sensorial way, without names and landmarks. Such an approach to Buenos Aires in literature is quite uncommon. The alienated characters in the city in the prose of Roberto Arlt, for example, confront a monstrous metropolis, a threatening entity beyond human control, a predicament quite different from the one

described in *El cielo dividido,* where Eleonora's Buenos Aires is subordinated to the microcosm of her individual perceptions.

The emotional city: reconnecting with people

Once back in Buenos Aires, Eleonora is out of place, even though she has been longing to return there. As we have seen so far, she feels alienated in the physical city with which she comes into contact through her sensory *flânerie*. But what she wants to recover is not only her relationship with the physical environment of streets and cafés. The Buenos Aires she is searching for also entails the people she left there. She has to reconstruct her emotional world, reconnect with some people, and eliminate others from her life. Such a step is necessary for all who return from exile. People usually intrinsically connect their sense of identity to intense memories of places and people that saw them grow up. When away from home, two lives, the old one *here* (in exile) and the new one *there* (at home), are separate. Displacement creates a distance; therefore, being in exile implies not a state, or essence, but a very particular point of view:

> You've got one life *here* and another *there* – with everything the word life implies: codes deciphered and mastered; systems of reference learned; the incredible complexity of the everyday; possibly even a different language, which is the whole world unto itself. [...] *Here*, you set aside what you used to be. The people around you haven't the vaguest notion of your childhood, with its nursery rhymes, food, schools, friends, neighborhoods [...] everything that shaped you, contributed to making you who you are, they know nothing of any of this and you tell yourself that it doesn't realty matter because you're convinced that you preserve it all inside you somewhere, deep within your heart – or your memory – and that, even if you never talk about it, you can never lose it. *There* you've set aside what you've become. (Huston: 10-11)

In the exile's mind, family, friends, and lovers left behind all remain unchanged, as if they lived only in an unchanging past. Because of their absence, persons in exile miss the continuing life stories and the continuing experiences of those who remained. Doreen Massey would conclude with the reminder that those who come back need to accept the fact that they will not encounter the place they once knew and they cultivated nostalgically in their minds while away from home. They must catch up with the ongoing trajectories of the people they re-encounter and what they have become in the "here-and-now".

For this reason, visits from home, while still in exile, are important and emotional for displaced people given that the visitors can form a "bridge" between the two lives of an exile. For Eleonora, however, the only such visit she experienced in the United States was by her friend Alia. But it was not an experience that made Eleonora's two worlds, her *here* and *there*, come together. On the contrary, it made them even more distant. Alia's visit was not a positive experience and Eleonora felt it necessary all the time to justify her life choices in Princeton to her judgmental friend:

> Como buena anfitriona, Eleonora paseó a Alia por Princeton y sus alrededores, por Philadelphia y Nueva York; y la llevó a conocer sus lugares preferidos, suponiendo equivocadamente que éstos despertarían en su amiga algún interés. [...] Eleonora tuvo la certeza de que algo se había terminado para siempre. No obstante, esforzándose por sonreír, le dijo: –¿Qué teníamos en común [...]? (16-17)

Alia's visit symbolizes the impossibility of communication and going back to the way things used to be in the past between those who leave and those who stay behind, something that Eleonora begins to realize first during Alia's visit to Princeton and to feel later more fully when she faces people in Buenos Aires.

During her first weeks back in Buenos Aires, *porteños* generally annoy Eleonora. She does not understand the frustrations of living in postdictatorial Argentina: "todos eran economistas, todos hablaban de dinero y de su escasez; de su escasez, principalmente su madre" (28). At the time, on an individual level, she feels alienated too. Her mother, the only family member mentioned in the novel, is a difficult person to connect with because she hardly ever stays at home with her daughter. During rare moments when she does, she tends to adhere to her solitary ways of life, as if she had already given up paying attention to Eleonora's feelings during her absence. Even their conversations are superficial, mostly having to do with the weather. One day, when Eleonora tries to get some air into the house because she feels as if she is suffocating, her mother reacts in a way that exemplifies their changed relationship:

> Su madre, molesta por la corriente de aire, le había pedido que cerrara alguna ventana. Aunque la petición había sido enunciada en buenos terminos, Eleonora decidió que alquilaría un departamento ni bien se sintiera en condiciones de afrontar la búsqueda. Fue también en aquel momento cuando decidió llamar a Alia. (17)

In addition to renewing her relationship with her mother, Eleonora desperately wants to reconstruct her relationships with other friends, but it seems as if the reality of Buenos Aires is against her search for the people from the past:

> Se veía discando números telefónicos, entregada a la tarea de hallar a las personas que algo habían significado para ella. Pero las comunicaciones se cortaban, daban equivocado o, lo que era peor, nadie atendía. Marcaba una y otra vez cada número sin alcanzar a oír al otro lado de la línea una sola voz amable. Desconcierto y extravío rigieron los pasos de la semana inicial. (14)

The home place and the people left behind are always present in the exile's imagination. But Nancy Huston reminds us that the fact that "friends and relatives

from 'back home' [are] always present in [our] minds as the witnesses of [our] lives" (17) does not mean that the people at home feel the same way:

> Your departure did not leave a gaping hole back there. The lives of your loved ones are (as French say it) full as an egg. [...] Your loved ones don't spend their time trying to picture you in your new life – what a silly idea! They picture nothing at all. They don't know so they don't care. Their minds are filled to brimming with their own lives. (18)

This leads to complication when they all meet again. When Eleonora meets Alia, there is an immediate air of misunderstanding between them. She feels she can never retrieve their friendship: "Sintió vértigo, desamparo y un fuerte impulso homicida" (17). Alia is a heavy drinker and she exhibits some bizzare behaviors. She explains for example "cada noche [...] espero que entren ladrones [...] planeo sigilosamente cómo enfrentarlos, cómo sorprenderlos [...] practico tomas de karate, golpes certeros, afilo las cuchillas" (21). Moreover, Alia does not have the slightest idea why Eleonora has returned: "¿A qué viniste, Ellis?", she asks at first. Alia herself dreams of fleeing Argentina and, in fact, decides to leave at the end of the novel. (18). Thus, Eleonora looks at her friend in a new light during their first meeting, as if she were a complete stranger: "Era otra, una desconocida" (20) and wonders if the only thing they had in common were the shoes in the same style they both wore on one occasion.

During her first months in Buenos Aires, Eleonora establishes other relationships with various female friends. It is important to emphasize that she engages in intimate relationships with women, a part of her identity that was silenced in the United States. New York and Princeton, the places of her exile, are a touchstone against all that happens to her in Buenos Aires upon her return, as if in Argentina Eleonora became a completely new self. Little or no attachment to the

places she inhabited in exile and her lack of passionate and strong relationships with people (the introspective, taciturn Frank, for example) are the total opposite of her sensory experiences in Buenos Aires and the emotional and exciting relationships with Donna or Mijal. These relationships demonstrate that Buenos Aires is a place where life is lived exceptionally fully and passionately, and people's emotions are expressed more externally than in the Northern hemisphere.

Of these two love stories the obsessive affair with Mijal stands out especially because it exemplifies how Buenos Aires becomes a city of emotion for Eleonora. Mijal is a strong-minded woman for whom Eleonora falls at first sight. She moves into Eleonora's newly furnished and ordered apartment and occupies her space, so that what starts as an intense romance quickly evolves into Eleonora's emotional prison. As a consequence of Mijal's powerful personality and the growing intimacy between them, Eleonora, once again, feels like she is suffocating and decides to end their liaison. They break up twice and, in the end, it becomes clear to Eleonora that she is not ready for any serious, commited relationship with other people. After leaving Mijal on the street

> Eleonora la apartó de su camino, avanzó hacia el final del puente, miró el cielo, vio una lámina clara de luna ocultarse detrás de una nube y apuró el paso, se mezcló con la muchedumbre de la calle, ganó varias cuadras de distancia y no sintió pena. (166)

In the end, it seems like the *fervor de Buenos Aires* makes Eleonora's emotional life more juvenile because it lacks commitment and stability; she becomes a completely different person from her secure and mature North American self.

When we move away, people and places we grew up with move on too. The sooner we realize this simple fact of life, the faster we can deal with the feelings of

separation and disorientation upon our return. Although Eleonora has returned to Buenos Aires in search of the places and people she has always related to, she realizes that both of them have moved on and she has missed all the experiences in between her leaving and return so that she cannot relate to them in the same way. As Nancy Huston remarks, returning to people we loved is not possible:

> The truth, however, is that your soul, like your body, has moved away from its point of departure. And the day comes when you're forced to recognize that you no longer share the values of people who brought you into the world, talked and sang to you as a child. [...] Even if you haven't been initiated into the intricacies of a foreign language, you no longer speak their tongue. (14)

Eleonora's relationships with people in Buenos Aires belong to sense of the Argentinean capital as a place. They represent the kinds of interactions she had with the city as she grew up, not only sensorial, but also very emotional and passionate interactions that, in the end, only serve to deepen her feelings of alienation and confusion because they belong to another time.

A point of return: Buenos Aires in fragments

All Eleonora's attempts to reconnect with Buenos Aires, undoubtedly incline her towards the creation of a new relationship with the city. However, they do not render it any more legible or transparent, in terms of either the literary description of the city or the character's sense of place. Eleonora's world is like the narrative of the novel, a chaotic mix of sensory experiences, passionate emotions, and nostalgic memories. The Buenos Aires that she recovers after her return is not the coherent image from her memory that she expected to encounter upon her return. Eleonora realizes that her decision to come back to Buenos Aires, even though she planned to stay only

temporarily, has irreversibly deepened the division of her world initiated by exile: "era una leona de dos cabezas, de dos mundos" (37).

The title of the novel "el cielo dividido" can be understood as the "broken" or the "divided sky". When she decides to stay in the city of her present, she agrees to a life under such a sky. She acknowledges the possibility of never going back to the Buenos Aires she once knew in the past and left, especially given that it was also a scenario of torture and violence. This rupture with the past is symbolized in one of the last scenes of the novel describing an explosion in a bar. Eleonora leaves her apartment because she feels suffocated by Mijal, who never leaves her alone. She walks, consumed by her passion for Mijal, into the centre of the city. Her walk anticipates a turning point in her life: "se vistió y bajó a la calle. En el centro había una melancolía que no era alicaída, sino una especie de formación volcánica, como si algo estuviese a punto de estallar" (150). After following a person she thinks is her long lost lover/friend Giselle, who probably disappeared/died during the dictatorship, she enters a bar she used to frequent and know well before leaving Argentina. Once inside, the narration becomes confusing, we are not sure if Eleonora actually talks to Giselle, or imagines talking to her. During their conversation, Eleonora has an apocalyptic vision: the bar where she and Giselle tell their stories from their past – events occurred while they have not seen each other – suddenly starts to dismantle and sink:

> Los cristales de las puertas, tallados al ácido, se quebraron repentinamente. Tras esto hubo una larga serie de fracturas en la entrada. La puerta se salió de quicio, las hojas cayeron con un golpe seco y los vidrios se hicieron añicos. [...] De pronto brincaron los resortes de las butacas generando una vibración tan sonora que Eleonora apenas pudo oír las últimas palabras de Giselle. [...] Un pedazo de cielo raso se desgarró y

> cayó casi a los pies de Giselle. [...] El suelo [...] se hundió y, con el hundimiento, la barra del bar se rajó en cuatro [...] con el reboso simultáneo de los sumideros, la inundación se produjo en segundos. (153-55)

In a way, the annihilation of the place, although imaginary, ruins Eleonora's reunion with Giselle and breaks a conversation that seemed to provide, in the end, a sense of coherence through Giselle's own explanations of her disappearance. But, as the bar explodes and sinks in a flood, the conversation ends with Giselle's enigmatic last words: "me prometí – continuó Giselle, ajena a la catástrofe – una vida distinta. Cierta vez descubrí una casa en la montaña. [...] Allí me encontrarás en un par de años" [...] (154). At this point, the vision is gone; Eleonora drops a glass on the floor, but soon realizes that much more than the glass is broken.

The image of the explosion/destruction/sinking of the bar is emblematic of the novel itself. Like fragmented paintings of the cubists where objects are represented as if shattered so that they may be viewed as a composite of many parts and from many different angles. The bar explodes but remains there just the same, a composite of all its fragments. In the same way, the unrecognizable/recognizable city, which has no name for the readers and is no longer identifiable for Eleonora is nonetheless Buenos Aires, a familiar structure. As in Roffé's book, however, the city is a construct composed of pieces and fragments, collected by Eleonora during her stay and textualized through a chaotic, fragmented narration.

The scene in the bar allows Eleonora to understand that she will probably never get any coherent answers about her disappeared friend and must let go of the idea of ordering and naming the traumatic experiences of her past, writing them into the linear, coherent narrative of a thesis. She knows that, as a consequence, she will

never be able to put the pieces together into a complete image and recover the lost, nostalgic image of Buenos Aires. She also realizes that she has to live with what the place has become for her and will never find the place that she created in her mind in exile. She decides to stay in the Buenos Aires of her present and live "componiendo un mundo personal, alienado y fragmentario para buscar, y a veces encontrar, la propia voz, como en un cofre antiguo, el ordenamiento de los sentidos y un sentido último" (161).

Roffé's novel evokes the problematic idea of a sense of place as experienced by a displaced person who eventually comes to terms with the fact that home is not home any more once it has been left behind and that the sense it has as a place has to be re-invented, in a progressive way, in order for it to retain meaning. In many ways, this takes us back to the words of Andrew Largeman, a character from the movie *Garden State*, mentioned at the beginning of this thesis. For him, it is clear that we miss the idea of home we create in our minds, and that, if we want to go back and recover this place, our home, we need to re-invent it or "create a new idea of home" for ourselves. Because we cannot go back in space and time, we have to make new connections with place, and accept that, although they may never become complete and consistent images, they will be our places, forever to re-invent and discover anew.

Conclusion

My approach to the analysis of two examples of literary representations of Buenos Aires by contemporary women writers stems from the insights of Human and Cultural Geography about individual and cultural experience of place and sense of place as an organizing element of human life, especially under conditions of exile from a home place. The aim of my analysis is to understand how Buenos Aires holds a special meaning for particular female characters who either remained away from their city for many years or returned to it after a period of exile. Their sense of place is an outcome of individual perceptions and traumatic experiences that are removed in time and become part of their memory, at the same time as the place of this memory is enhanced by its portrayal in Argentinean culture, by poets, novelists, or tango lyricists.

Luisa Valenzuela in *La travesía* and Reina Roffé in *El cielo dividido* have textualized the complexity of the experience of place at home and in exile both through the figure of the *flâneuse* on the move and in the fragmentary narration through which the *flânerie* of Marcela Osorio and Eleonora Ellis is represented. The cities in the novels are familiar and recognizable but are not described as coherent constructs. On the contrary, the reminiscences of culturally shared images of Buenos Aires and New York are re-worked by fragmentary and subjective explorations of female walkers who become part of an urban space that is written in relation to their movements.

The premise of my thesis was that a sense of place changes with a person's movement. According to cultural geographer Doreen Massey, displaced subjects have to re-define their sense of place and accept its progressive character as a phenomenon re-negotiated in every encounter with familiar places in what Massey has called "spatio-temporal event". They have to let go of their nostalgic fixation on the identity of places from their past in order to come to terms with their experiences and live their present and present places. Against this idea, I anticipated that an analysis of two fictional characters "anthropologizing" in New York or encountering Buenos Aires sensually and emotionally would allow me to explore the mechanisms of re-creation of a sense of place and the construction of its meaning by displaced subjects.

The theoretical exploration undertaken in the first chapter that led to a working definition of place and a sense of place, was a necessary step in order to differentiate between a concept of space and the idea of place. It also made it possible to define place as a material environment endowed with a meaning that is culturally modified, but reworked through individual sensory and emotional perspective. Places are lived and experienced, but are also held in our memory, which also contributes to how our sense of place is constantly re-created.

Considering that places are always under construction, never finished and closed, because they are part of our ongoing experience of life, we have to confront the limitations of their literary representation. As Ingrid Stefanovic asks: "How does one investigate sense of place, without transforming place into either a material, quantifiable object 'out there', or a reflection of arbitrary, nebulous subjective emotions?" (website). Her question also applies to the problem of approaching the

literary city. A summary review of the history of urban literary representation in the last two hundred years in chapter 2 has shown how literature has dealt with the textual reconstruction of the cityscape. During that time, the focus has shifted from realist and naturalist accounts of the social changes in the city to more subjective projections of city experiences, especially embodied in the figure of the *flâneur*, a modern urban observer. This social, historically bounded figure can also be activated in the context of the contemporary metropolis, where *flânerie* has become a way of critically approaching postmodern urban spaces through a reading of the city from its fragments and creating, in a never-ending practice of *bricolage*, new constellations of urban meanings. The concept of the *flâneuse*, a female walker in the city who practices a sensory and emotional everyday exploration from within its streets, emphasizes the possibilities of openness. It proposes a subjective look from the inside as opposed to the more objective and detached, and therefore controlling and limiting look of the *flâneur*, the male observer.

Mirroring the evolution of the literary city in Western literature, the literary image of Buenos Aires, as presented in the third chapter, has shown how a powerful cultural icon has been created through the realistic and symbolic representations of the last two centuries. Buenos Aires has been constructed as a monstrous city antagonistically opposed to rural Argentina, a colossus capable of enormous impact on the life of its inhabitants. However, it was also important to observe for the purposes of my analysis of the two novels I eventually consider that Buenos Aires has also been constructed in terms of its absence, as a city of immigration and exile, where feelings of nostalgia and displacement are common both within and beyond the

city. The condition of displacement, in particular, was seen to create a distance from the home place in space and time, which individuals, naturally, seek to overcome by constructing a sense of belonging through the imaginary idea of home. The return to Buenos Aires, whether in Marcela's mind or in reality in the case of Eleonora, requires a re-creation of a sense of home based on the actual, sensory and emotional experience of the everyday city. Just like Andrew Largeman from Zach Braff's movie, a displaced person has to open up to the idea that places move on along with people, so that home is changed on return to it. No one, in fact, can return to exactly the same place.

In *La travesía*, the novel by Luisa Valenzuela explored in the fourth chapter, Marcela Osorio practices *flânerie* in New York, but instead of mapping the city of her present, her walks allow her to chart a sketch of her own self as she picks up bits and pieces of the Buenos Aires of her past on the way. Her physical *travesía* through present New York is also a *travesía* in time, to the traumatic Buenos Aires that symbolizes the oppression to which she was subjected by the State and a patriarchal society. As she tries to come to terms with what Buenos Aires means to her, she realizes that the best way to exorcize her troubled past is to accept as part of herself the deeply denied image of home that lives in her memory. The release that this gives her will also open her to the possibility of creating a new sense of place that she intends to explore in the near future, during her first visit home after twenty years of absence. Valenzuela's novel provides a means for exploring the mechanisms of dealing with a past/imaginary place, a lost home, and the influences it exerts on a sense of present places of exile.

My analysis of *El cielo dividido* by Reina Roffé in the last chapter, contributes to a deeper understanding of the workings of the images from one's past in the recreation of the sense of place on returning home after a period of absence. Eleonora Ellis's struggle to reconcile the imaginary idea of home created in her mind during her exile with the unfamiliar, real Buenos Aires, showed how a sense of place cannot be considered a coherent construct, ready-made and unchangeable. Resembling my own experience of return to my home city, Warsaw, Eleonora acknowledges that her Buenos Aires, an intrinsic part of her identity, is only a projection of her mind. Estranged in the city, she accepts that she will never recover the past. Instead, by re-establishing sensory and emotional links with people and locations in the city, she is able to create a new feel for her place, without it being a definitive or complete one.

My discussion of the two novels has led me to conclude that the images of the Argentinean capital they offer are grounded in a subjective experience of the city that challenges the totalizing, conventional image of Buenos Aires, a realm generally dominated by a male gaze and sense of order. Neither of the two authors searches for a literal, controlling and complete representation of the material place. Through figures of exiled *flâneuses* that intend to discover or recover the Buenos Aires of their minds through the everyday, unique experiences of *flânerie*, they redefine the spirit of Buenos Aires in terms of their renegotiation of the cultural with the individual. In this way, the novels construct the sense of place of Buenos Aires as temporary and progressive rather than authentic and essentialist. The exploration of the ways characters perceive present and absent places contributes to a deeper understanding of how the relationships of people and places are constructed and how they can be

represented in literature.

There is no doubt that contemporary world cities, such as Buenos Aires or New York, are complex, fragmented, and global places. Some critics warn that, as a consequence, a sense of place is becoming irrelevant in the *non-place urban realm*, a postmodern global metropolis where it is much more difficult for a person to identify with an individual/imaginary or collective sense of places. Consequently, it seems troublesome to capture the total city as a whole in literature. One response to the problem of representation of such an unstable and fragmented sense of place may be to resort to subjective micro-histories that are always closely related to places. Everyone has their *own* city that they know well, defined by the everyday use of its spaces. Perhaps Valenzuela and Roffé have found a way through their narrative of *flânerie* to evoke the reality of urban life more fully by considering the city not just as its streets, plazas, and cafés but in terms of how the individual lives it through the body and everyday experience. These women writers are moving us towards a more personal and experiential account of cities that will not render *the* sense of place but rather senses of place in flux.

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